



Discipleship
for everyone

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Contents

Introduction	4
Before it all happens	6
Before anything else	6
They want this.....	6
They change their world for this.....	7
They want to learn	7
They will evaluate.	7
In the church	8
Bonding Phase.....	12
A critical issue in bonding	17
The Levels of Discipleship	18
Basic 1 – Feeding/emotional.....	20
Basic 2 – Language – learn to talk – establish identity	24
Self 1 Feeding – learn to read	31
Self 2 – Language – investigation.....	37
Growth 1 – Feeding – self and developing confidence.....	45
Growth 2 – Language – listening.....	52
Adult 1 – feeding – deepening life	57
Adult 2 Language – conscious of others	65
Ideas for engagement in each level of development	69

Introduction

I have been doing a lot of reflecting on the concept of discipleship. This word has gained new popularity in these days. I remember when nobody talked about discipleship and there were hardly any books or materials written about and for this important aspect of ministry and missions. Going into all the world to make disciples was defined as sending specialists, evangelists and missionaries, to present the gospel. They were to do the work and basically establish non-propagating churches.

I say this because without discipleship only a few who feel uniquely called will proclaim the gospel and help the gospel to reach beyond the confines of the church. As a result, we have created a weak and dependent church. We are seeing the impact of this in our world today. As a whole, the members of the body of the church are weak and untrained or unprepared to function in the world beyond the confines of the church.

In the eighties there was a short-lived period of time where discipleship became a topic of discussion and development of materials. It is my belief that that rush to produce materials killed it again. Instead of helping people become capable leaders and disciplemakers we again made them dependent. This time not only on key leaders but on the concept that unless you had the right program or material then you could not do discipleship.

I realize I am being a bit harsh. This is not to say that no one was doing discipleship. There are always those who see the need and fill it. Unfortunately, there have not been enough of them. Well maybe enough to have a local impact but not enough to be a catalyst to make the changes needed on a more global scale.

Again, we have begun to see an upswing in the interest in discipleship and the key point driving this is a better interpretation of the Matthew 28:18-20 passage. Now the first phrase has become the focus. It is the command to go and 'make disciples.' Not the watered-down version we have lived with far too long, 'go and tell them the gospel, get them to confess, and join the church so the leaders can take care of them.'

This new clarity focuses on the reality that we need to do more than get them to attend church. We need to help them to become followers of Jesus, to be disciples, those whose life and activity reflects, mimics, and reveals all that Christ taught. It focuses on bringing us back to a desire to be in God's word and be discipled so that we can clearly declare our allegiance (baptism) and teach them how to know all of what Jesus taught, so they can repeat the process.

So why this title 'Everyone can Disciple?'

It is because, as I have been reading again the gospels and reflecting on what discipleship was, I began to realize that every adult has been through a process of discipleship and any parent has either done it or is doing it. You may ask how this is possible?

Think about this. The key focus of discipleship or the key goal is to reproduce in those who believe, a mature functional follower of Jesus capable of repeating the process with others.

Consider this reality. Every parent has a goal of discipling their children to become functional and mature adults. Mature adults capable of repeating the process with their children. This process starts even before there is a pregnancy. This also means that everyone has been through this process of being discipled to

be a functional mature adult. I will admit that it does not always work as we hoped but the truth is that more often than not the desired result is realized.

The intent of this book is to explore this concept and see if we can help everyone use what they already know to follow the first words of the Great Commission to “go and make disciples.”

Before it all happens

As we begin our study of this topic, we need to cover some ideas and concepts and then create a structure to guide and evaluate what will come later.

Before anything else

In the normal flow of life. I need to emphasize normal, since so much that, is not what God intended as normal, is happening in our world. In the normal flow of life people get married and plan/expect to have children. And before they get to that point the husband and wife are in the first phase of being disciplined. They are preparing themselves for what lies ahead.

They will spend the next period of time learning to understand each other. They will learn their areas of skill and weakness. They will learn who has the skills for the different areas of responsibility and activity as relates to becoming a functional couple. They are actually discipling each other with the goal of establishing a mature marriage. They learn about each other. They learn to adapt to each other. They learn to help each other in this process. That is the goal. Handled well this period of discipleship/training/development will become the base for all that lies ahead. The better they are at understanding each other's strengths and weaknesses, the better they will do in discipling/raising their children to become adults.

Now comes the disclaimer. Like everything else in this world that involves humans, this process is fraught with challenges and failure. They will make mistakes and misunderstand each other. They will develop poor habits and there will be errors in learning to communicate correctly and effectively. This makes it sound a bit like a mission impossible scenario. But it is the reality.

One other point to be made is that all of the struggles and failures may not have a negative result. They may provide the door to improving and correcting the errors when they do have a child. It is amazing how a newborn can help a couple see more clearly and make critical changes that benefit themselves and the new life they are responsible for.

Does this sound a bit frightening? Good. It should. It is an incredible responsibility. The good news is that most parents want to succeed and there is an incredible number of resources available to help them become a mature married couple in anticipation of this mountainous responsibility. Keep in mind that though there are resources they never match the reality that is raising a child. There are just too many variables. The materials can only provide possible guides and suggestions. Each parent/child situation is unique. This is an important fact to keep in mind and is also true of every discipleship event. There is no manual that covers every possibility and twist in the process. Why because every person is different. Every environment where this process occurs is different as well. Finally, every child born to them will be unique.

They want this

This is another interesting aspect of the process. Young people get married with the hope that they will have a child, as frightening and difficult as that may appear. In fact, in the hopes of or anticipation of a baby, they will make all kinds of preparations and plans.

If possible, they will choose a place to live or make a move to be in as good a place as possible to raise a child. This may not always be possible, but they desire this and think about what will be needed to make the place where they plan to raise a child as functional as possible to do the best job possible. And

when they can't they are frustrated and concerned about how they are going to do a good job given where they live and what is happening around them.

They want to be parents. This doesn't alleviate their fears, level of nervousness, or uncertainty. And it shouldn't. It is a big, no immense, no colossal, endeavor. Even so they go down the road willingly and with joy. Why do we not have the same mix of emotions when we talk about discipling people and helping them become productive and mature followers of Jesus? Why do the followers of Christ not seek out and prepare for this, as frightening and demanding as it may appear? Simple answer. We do not encourage it in the same way we encourage young couples to have children.

They change their world for this

Once the advent of a child is certain and sometime even before, the couple begin to reorganize their world so that there is space – physically, emotionally, and relationally – for the new entity who is about to enter their world.

They want to learn

They will take classes or read books on many things

1. Childbirth classes – so the delivery will be less stressful for them and for the new arrival
2. Dietary courses – so that they will provide the best nutrients for the growing baby.
3. Child rearing courses – so they will understand how to correctly provide for the baby as it grows and develops.

They will make changes.

1. They will begin to change their routines. There is no way to avoid this. A pregnant mother will cause changes step by step just because of what is happening to her body. The father will make changes or risk the wrath of an emotional hormonal mother to be.
2. They will begin to rearrange their lives. This happens because pregnancy requires it, and a newborn will not allow the norm to remain unchanged.
3. They will begin to reorganize their finances. This is a reality that cannot be escaped. Baby showers reveal the reality of the need to provide for another person in the house. That and the rules about car seats etc come into play and will affect their finances.
4. They will rearrange the house and other spaces. This must be done in order to accommodate the extra member of the house and all that pertains to that person. So many parents to be create a nursery for this purpose. I saw it happen with one of my sons and the visitor's bedroom disappeared and I had to find other places to stay if I wanted to visit. Which leads us to the next area.
5. They will begin to adjust their social life. The presence of a baby will alter the social life of that couple. This will require any number of adjustments, considerations, and compromises. That and the fact that grandparents seem to have a special affinity for grandchildren which creates another layer of social adjustment.

They will evaluate.

1. They will review what they have to surrender in order to be good parents.
2. They will review what they are gaining by accepting another human being into their life.
3. They will review their priorities and how they may need to be reworked.

4. They will review their long-term plans to include another person.
5. They will review what will need to change and how long it will remain that way.

All this happens in anticipation of the arrival of a new person into their world.

In the church

Now let us take a look at what happens in the church. We do so many things that are counterproductive in relation to healthy growth of the members of the body of Christ.

1. We teach over and over that only certain people can go. We do this in a subtle way by suggesting that in order to hear the good news they must come to the church. Then we design our programs around this concept that the best way to present the gospel is in the confines of a building.
2. We teach over and over that people can only learn about the bible and biblical truth in specific settings. For many years Sunday School was this setting. And step by step we turned this over to a select group, the teachers. We added other programs on Wednesdays and other days but always with the idea that specific people were the ones to do the teaching. The problem was that it was a false context that could not be duplicated. We took the teaching out of the real-life context of the home and put it elsewhere. This is counter to what is taught in Deuteronomy about parents being the ones to teach their children.
3. We teach that only certain ones have the ability to teach and train others in how to live. We see this in the importance given to the Sunday sermon, or the bible study given by the pastor at the prayer meeting (something that has almost disappeared from existence), the importance of seminars and retreats and on the list could go that focus on a person teaching us how to live. Always reinforcing the idea that only certain ones can disciple others.
4. We teach that small groups are the place to grow. This sounds great at one level. For once we are moving in the right direction. In a small group there exists a greater possibility of dealing with issues in a real time, and real-life setting. But if it is not guided properly, it too becomes a place of dependency on the host or leader to provide the guides. When they function correctly, they grow and divide. There is a new movement happening that involves reexploring the concept of house churches. Small groups that care for its members at a more personal level.

In all of these the focus is not on empowering followers to care for or disciple a person but on someone providing this for the members of a group.

If you look at a family, we see this truth. While parents may allow or delegate certain areas and responsibilities to others, i.e., schools, to teach them critical topics for living in a given place. They are still the ones responsible for the overall growth and development of their child. They provide the structure that makes it possible for other structures to function and succeed. A sad reality is that so often the parents do not see this and, in a sense, abdicate a fair share of their responsibility and capacity to influence to other structures and other people. As a result, others may have more impact in the development and discipling of their children than the parents.

Is this wrong? Is there a need for others, who are experts and authorities to have access and input in the lives of our child?

Of course there is. In the church they are called apostles, teachers, prophets, and pastors. In the world they are administrators, counselors, teachers, coaches and on the list goes. People that provide specific

input at important times. But their input and involvement should not overshadow or replace the role of the parent. It is the parent who provides the structure and support that allows for the other sources of information to function properly.

That brings us back to the problem in the church. We don't have discipling at a parental level. We only have the other sources, and they have a limited capacity to care for those they encounter.

Consider this. A parent is able to interact with their children every day for the most part and for long periods of time. The parent is present, and the child knows that. And while they may not be in conversation or an activity together for all of the time, they are together and there is an awareness that it can happen at any time and when there is need. If not in the moment at some near point in time and space. That is the idea, and we know that because we are not perfect it doesn't always happen the way it should, but the possibility exists.

Now, a leader, cannot do this. They cannot be present in a person's life in the same way that a parent can. Most realize this and seek ways to help the parents be a better parent and fill the needs of their children. A leader cannot have dinner with everyone in his/her care every night. That person cannot be present for everyone to tuck them into bed and pray with them. They cannot be there for everyone to greet them in the morning when they get up. A parent can.

We know this and yet we do not apply this knowledge to the process of discipleship. We do not see the need for such personal contact and awareness. We expect a leader to be completely involved in the lives of those under their care. This is not possible and yet that is how we think. And we perpetuate this belief year after year.

If you did that with your children, they would not grow up or mature. They would not have enough input or example of what it means to be an adult to know how to interact and behave when around others. If that was possible then orphanages should not bother with the process of adoption. But they know that they cannot properly disciple children to be functional adults. They know that children need to be in a home with parents that care for them and guide them in the process.

But we do not see this reality in the church and the church becomes like an orphanage. It begins to believe that only a few can properly raise a new believer to be a mature Christian. The sad truth is we may think it works. But stop and look at the church today.

- We have so many people that are spectators.
- We have so many people that never grow up as Christians and continue to need milk to survive (a key concern of Paul.)
- We have so few doing the work and they cannot do enough to fill the need.
- We have become too focused in the wrong priorities (I will let you think through what that means).
- We have made the wrong things priorities and so the gospel is not proclaimed, and the life of the church becomes unbalanced with only a few doing the work everyone should be doing.
- We have failed to obey the command to make disciples.

Sadly, what happens is that in fact we do make disciples and they are copies of who we are and not of Jesus.

What needs to happen is to start getting excited about having a baby in the house. We need to be like those wanting to have children and doing everything discussed above to prepare ourselves, our environment, and our plans to allow another person into our life. One we can disciple and to help grow and become a mature Christian.

What needs to happen is that we need to begin to think through how to restore the role of disciplinemaker to every member of the body. Just like every young couple hopes to one day become a parent we need to instill that desire into the members of the body of Christ.

We need to realize that in fact, whether we are aware of what is happening or not, every one of us is actually disciplining others. We are teaching, by our own life and example, how to become copies of who we are. And the sad thing is that no matter what the teacher, pastor, or key leader says or does, most of those they teach will become like all the others around them, uninvolved and expecting someone else to do the work of disciplining.

So a quick review of what expectant parents are doing as a guide for what needs to be done:

1. They want this -We need to help people want to disciple. We need to help them see that is a normal and healthy part of being part of the body of Christ.
2. They want to be parents – We need to help people understand the command given to all of us to make disciples. We need to find ways to instill this in their lives, to help them see that this should be a natural result of becoming part of the family of God, to reproduce.
3. They want to learn – We need to help people realize that they have at hand the greatest tool available to help them disciple others. It is the word of God. We need to help them learn to use this resource to be better prepared to become the parents – natural, surrogate, adopted, or whatever other category you can think of – for another person. We need to help people have a hunger for the word of God. We also need to provide specific tools for the situations they may encounter along the way.
4. They will make changes – This is the frightening part because we don't like to change our lives to accommodate others. Yet expectant parents do this even though there are struggles in the process. There are always struggles. They see the rightness of making such changes. This same attitude needs to become part of what we work on developing in every member of the body, a desire and willingness to change in order to disciple another.

One other thing. This process of making changes does not stop with the first child. It is repeated over and over whenever another child is born. This should be a reminder that disciplining is not over just because we have helped one. We need to be willing to repeat this process and allow the family to grow.

5. They will evaluate – this is always critical in preparing for a person to enter our life. It is important to review what must be surrendered, what will be gained, and how our priorities will need to be reorganized. Why because each time a person enters our world these will be different. It is about counting the cost and seeing the benefits and blessings of what lies ahead and so making wise decisions.

For a church to grow and be healthy it needs to be one capable of reproducing. It needs to have the desire to bring others into the world, into the family of God, and see them cared for and disciplined. It needs to

awaken, in all of its members, the desire to be a disciple maker, to become the parent, so to speak, to another person.

The fact is that we all are involved in discipling our children or have parents discipling us. The point of this material is to encourage us to use this knowledge and experience to disciple others.

Bonding Phase

Bonding phase: this is from the birth of the child to an unknown date. It is when parents do any number of things to let the baby know they are the parents. This is a critical time in the development of a child. It is when they learn who they belong to, who is caring for them, and in a real way who they can call on when they are in need and who they can trust to respond correctly to the need. It is quite interesting how parents learn the difference between crying for food, crying for a dirty diaper, crying for sickness, and crying to be held or feeling alone.

Parents also learn the signs of contentment, comfort, and happiness because the baby has sounds and actions for all of them. It is also clear when the baby is paying attention or notices something specific and in time parents learn what toy or item is wanted based on the baby's sounds and actions.

The baby learns that these people are always present or nearby. They hear them talking and see them interacting with them. They are aware that these people are ready to care for them at any point in time night or day.

They are always present, always talking, always providing, and so on.

Consider the following descriptions of the idea of bonding:

- Mirriam Webster Dictionary - the formation of a close relationship (as between a mother and child or between a person and an animal) especially through frequent or constant association
- KidsHealth.org/en/parents/bonding.html - Bonding is the intense attachment that develops between parents and their baby. It makes parents want to shower their baby with love and affection and to protect and care for their little one. Bonding gets parents up in the middle of the night to feed their hungry baby and makes them attentive to the baby's wide range of cries.

Bonding is a process, not something that takes place within minutes and not something that has to be limited to happening within a certain time period after birth. For many parents, bonding is a byproduct of everyday caregiving. You may not even know it's happening until you observe your baby's first smile and suddenly realize that you're filled with love and joy.

Now let's look a few scriptures that talk about God and his relationship to Israel and see what they may say about this process.

Ps 87:5

Indeed, of Zion it will be said, "This one and that one were born in her, and the Most High himself will establish her."

The passage talks about how those born to Zion will be established by God. This is a key aspect of bonding, the establishment of the key relationship of the baby with the one who will care for it.

Isa 46:3

"Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all you who remain of the house of Israel, you whom I have upheld since you were conceived, and have carried since your birth."

Again, in referring to Israel it is said that God has cared for them since their birth and has carried them. In many ways this is true as you look at the time in the desert. God responded to their calls for food and

water. He responded to their need for protection and for many other critical needs. His actions were much like a parent.

Eze 16:6-10

'Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, "Live!" 7 I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew up and developed and became the most beautiful of jewels. Your breasts were formed and your hair grew, you who were naked and bare. 8 "Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine. 9 "I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you.

This is the desire of all parents as they see their child born, they want it to live and are diligent in their care for the baby. Parents enter into a covenant, though not necessarily verbal, to care for the child and protect it. They bath the child and provide what is needed.

Dt 1:31

and in the desert. There you saw how the Lord your God carried you, as a father carries his son, all the way you went until you reached this place."

Again, the symbolism of a father carrying his baby until they reach a certain point in time when that will not be necessary.

Ps 22:9-10

you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother's breast. 10 From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.

Here the symbolism is clear in that God like the parents of a baby work at teaching the baby to trust them and make them aware of who their parents are.

Isa 49:1

Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name.

This is so true. Parents select names for their babies before they are born. They often pick one for a girl and a boy and practice saying them to the unborn child. In many cultures the name of the child is spoken out loud even as they enter the world. The doctor announces the gender, and they promptly speak the name. God treats us the same. He knows our name from before our birth and speaks it clearly.

Consider the following list of actions that parents perform in order to bond with their baby.

Touch – this one is obvious. Both parents want to hold the baby. For the mother this is so easy. For the father a bit terrifying for fear of hurting the baby but in the end, he does and then see his reaction and his willingness to do so in the days ahead. I know because that was how I felt.

Eye to eye contact – the new parents want to look into the eyes of their baby. And they look forward to the day when the child looks back. Day after day they look and the baby sees this attention and one day looks back and smiles.

Voice sound – even before the child is born parents are talking to the baby, playing music for the baby and protecting the baby from loud noises. None of this changes after the birth. In fact, it now increases. Just watch any new parent and you will see what I mean. Then watch everyone else do the same. The key is that eventually the baby will distinguish the difference between their parents and visitors.

These are but a few of the different ways in which parents' bond with their baby. Here is a longer list. Each represents a time and process that allows for and encourages the bonding process.

- Movement
- Feeding
- Participate in delivery
- Feeding
- Caring for needs
- Including baby in activities
- Vocal contact
- Speaking in general on any topic – doesn't have to be spiritual
- Music

The key date is when the baby identifies the people as their parents. This is not when they say dada or mama. It is when they can distinguish their parents from other people and know that these two people are the ones who care for them.

In adoption this date can come later but all the activity and work are the same. And the marker is identifying who their parents are.

With Jesus, the disciples and others were with Jesus every day. They heard him, watched him, touched him, and felt his emotions. When the challenge came and he asked them if they would abandon him their answer was simple, no one else has the word of life.

He was there when they struggled to understand his teaching. He took the time to expose himself to their struggles and didn't abandon them. They asked and he answered. They asked and he answered. They asked and he answered.

He was there to help them take their first baby steps. He sent them out to proclaim the coming of the kingdom and have authority to heal and to drive out demons. And when they became overly excited about the success they had had, he helped them see what was more important, not the power, but a relationship with the father. A relationship that would result in their name being written down in the book of life.

As small children they learned day after day who their true spiritual father was. Day after day they learned how to walk in faith. Day by day they learned the words that would help others learn what they had learned.

And the truth of what they had learned can be seen in how they proceeded after Pentecost. They met daily to teach the new believers. When something happened that would take them away from this critical bonding experience, they found others to care for the external things so they could continue the bonding process.

How many times do we see the phrase, "the children of God."

The first time is in John chapter one. *To as many as believed, to them was given the power to become the children of God.*

Jesus, on several occasions, stated very clearly that if we truly wanted to be part of the kingdom of God we needed to be like children. And being like children means bonding. Going through a process that helps us learn to speak, walk, and live like our parents. In this case a process that allows us to learn to speak, walk, and live like Jesus.

In fact, the statement is much clearer. He says become like children. Children learn who their parents are by repetition, constant contact, and constant practice. So that is what discipleship needs to look like. It needs to be that which allows a person to bond with Jesus, through the help and guidance of surrogate parents.

The first step then in discipleship is just this, spending enough time with a person in order for the bonding to occur. It is not about a program of teaching. It is about changing our life so they are included in all that is happening in our world and we are becoming a part of their world. A process that allows us to bring them to a point where they know who we are and choose to trust us.

In the bible we have the following phrases which in fact reflect concepts that make bonding possible.

- Let your light shine – Mt 5:16
- Be salt – Mt 5:13
- Do everything so as to win some – 1 Co 9:22
- Let your words and deeds reveal – 1 Pe 2:12
- Live at peace as much as possible – Ro 12:18
- Do nothing to – Ph 2:3-4
- And so on.

Responding to the needs of another will help us to establish a relationship with them and open the door for the next steps in the discipleship process. But if we are unwilling to know and be part of the life of another person in the same way we desire to be part of a baby's life then why should they listen to us? Why should they trust our answers to their questions? Why would they desire to grow if all they see are selfish isolated people?

Think about what would happen to a baby if we didn't listen to the baby, if we didn't respond to its needs, and if we avoided being around the baby except when it was pleasant and happy.

Bonding is a critical stage – connecting a person to another willing to care for them. Building confidence and awareness of this person. Many a new believer is lost and becomes just another member because they never had a bonding experience with another disciple.

There is nothing incredibly spiritual at this point. It is about identification and confidence. It is about availability and satisfying critical needs. It is not about teaching deep spiritual truths. Instead, it is about building a foundation that will create the trust needed in the steps that lie ahead.

It is about being seen and heard until a connection is made.

There is no set time for this to happen. For mothers it is easier fathers less so. Adoptive parents a bigger challenge. The same will be true of the bonding needed for discipleship. Every person is different and

what will be critical for this to happen will vary with each person. That is because every person is unique and so are babies. Ask any parent of two or more children about his and they will tell you how true it is.

This means that, while there are key elements in this process that are the same, how it all comes together will be different. The crucial factor will be the component of commitment to meeting the everyday needs of another person. Without that commitment the bonding will not happen and the person will remain a babe and helpless.

A critical issue in bonding

Bonding is a critical process in the development of a person. It creates the foundation for many aspects of life. A healthy bonding process gives a person a framework for their development.

In discipleship there is another critical aspect of the bonding process. We are not only to focus on developing this critical relationship with the person but at the same time help them to develop this same bond with Jesus. This is critical in their long-term development. If they only bond to us then they will not develop a deep relationship of their own with the Lord and will become dependent on us. This is not the purpose in parenting. Parents know the need for their children to be able to develop healthy relationships with others and be able to bond with their future spouse. We do at different points bond with others, a teacher, a coach, a friend, a mentor, and others. People who help us grow and accomplish our goals.

Our children can also bond with people who can damage them and cause problems. The best way to avoid that is providing a bonding process that helps them see

All too often we see key leaders that do not maintain this focus and we end up with personality cults within the church. People follow the person and their teaching more than following the Lord and his teaching.

Paul reflects on this in several passages in his letters to the Corinthians.

1 Co 4:15-16

Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel.

2 Co 3:1-3

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? 2 You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. 3 You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

1 Co 3:6-7

I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.

He considered himself their spiritual father and that as such they should pay attention to him at a certain level. But as you can see in the second passage the purpose of his fatherhood was so that they could become linked to Christ. They are, as he calls them, to be a letter from Christ not from Paul. Then in the last text we see this even clearer. Paul planted, Apollos (another person they bonded to – possibly) but it is God who carried out the work.

As we bond with people, we need to keep in mind that the relationship we develop should be result in them bonding with the Lord and

The Levels of Discipleship

At the level of bonding we are teaching one thing, who we are. There is a lot contained in that and it is critical to what lies ahead. It is the foundation that we build on. This will be a lifelong process and occurs at what I will call levels.

Before I give you that information, I want us to keep in mind that much of what we do in the early stages is done before those we are discipling understand what lies ahead and why we are doing what we are doing.

Before they understand language, we are teaching them the correct sounds that will be involved. Any child can learn any language at this point. As parents our focus is to help them begin to make the correct sounds. We do this by speaking to them.

Before they understand that they can crawl, walk, and run they see us doing it. They don't understand the mechanics, they don't understand the possibilities that await. They just began to move, and we encourage it. And yes, we have to create boundaries and protect them. Why because they don't understand the dangers around them.

We teach them to obey. At first this is done unconsciously. They make a sound we correct it until they do it right. They obey. They try to walk and fall. We help them up and encourage them to keep trying. They obey. At first it seems simple. What is interesting is how much they are teaching us about obedience. Think about how you obey them when they cry, when they reach out to you and so on.

We teach them to eat. At first they seem to be in control. They cry and mommy gives them breast milk and in time a bottle. But soon we are trying to get them to eat soft mushy foods, some of which we would never think of eating, at least in the form of mush. Then we move on to soft food, and so on. We encourage them to eat what is given to them. They don't always agree but we are teaching them to decide and communicate.

Why do we do this? it is because we want them to be good children. We want them to be good students. We want them to be good members of the community. We want them to be involved in healthy activities and find good friends. We want them to become functional adults and able to care for us at some time in the future.

For this to happen we begin a multilevel process of discipling them. Here are the different levels that I have been able to identify and will be the basis of investigation for the rest of the material. It is broken down into four major levels, Basic; Self; Growth; adult and then each into sublevels related to the major levels.

Basic 1 – Feeding/emotional and physical responses – simple truths

Clarity - life happens and there are mistakes – time of no criticism

Basic 2 – Language – learn to talk – establish identity

Movement – learn to walk

Self 1 – Feeding – learn to read

Clarity – Correction and repetition without criticism

Self 2 – Language – investigation

Movement – learning boundaries

Growth 1 – Feeding – self and developing confidence

Clarity – Self – evaluation personal

Growth 2 – Language – listening

Movement – application

Adult 1 – Feeding – deepening in life

Clarity – adapting and changing

Adult 2 – Language – conscious of others

Movement – loving others

Please keep in mind that these are general concepts. How they work for each individual will be different. What we have to decide is what we will choose to do. Let me explain.

I travel a great deal. I have learned there are two ways to travel. You can use the tourist guides and the books and so on. The problem is that many times what is promised is not the reality or it doesn't really match the reality of life in that location. Tourist sites are designed with tourists in mind and do not present what life is really like. Also, the guides are programmed to follow a certain pattern. They are not set up to meet my desires and interests. They tend to send people to specific places that cater to tourists and often are more costly. Finally, they are staged. They do not show you life as it is. Instead they show you unique and special things that are interesting but are not the everyday life of the people.

Consider this. How often do we set up our church and programs as if the people coming are tourists. They are just there to visit, have a good experience, and then go see something else. As a result, we structure things to fulfill that goal and not reveal what life is really like.

I prefer to have a local contact, someone I know. I prefer to stay in the house of a friend. I prefer to let them decide where to go and what to see. Many times, they will take me to places I would never think of, like to local restaurants that are not on the tourist guide list, and I will get to enjoy learning about their life. This helps me understand how things really work and gives me the tools I would need to live effectively in their country. Not all but a beginning.

To me a program or plan or structure for discipleship is like a tourist guide. You may get to see and enjoy some good things but all too often it does not relate to the reality that is life. It will never match my real needs and interests. It may touch on a few of them but not in the context of who I am and where I am.

This is what discipleship should look like. It should come not from professionals and based on what the tourist board etc thinks we want to see or should see. It comes from the heart of a person living in the context and experiencing it in real time. It is their life not their income. True discipleship is built around a relationship that knows where the real food is, the real history is, and so where the real life that is being

lived. This is the kind of discipleship we need. People who are living in the context of faith and service guiding those who want to learn how to do the same.

Basic 1 – Feeding/emotional

- Feeding/emotional – simple truths
- Clear/life happens – there is freedom to make mistakes

I want to list a few scriptures and then ask you to consider with me the discipling that occurs in the life of a baby Christian.

Weaned

- Hebrews 5:12 you need milk not solid food
- 1 Corinthians 3:2 I gave you milk not solid food
- 1 Peter 2:2 Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk
- Psalm 131:2 I have stilled my soul; liked a weaned child with is mother, like a weaned child is my soul
- Isaiah 28:9 to whom is he trying to explain his message? To children weaned from their milk,...?
- Ro 12:2 do not conform any longer to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind
- Co 3:10 you have taken off your old self and have put on the new self
- 2 Co 5:17 therefore if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone the new has come.

Now you may ask why have I chosen this set of scriptures? I find them interesting because they will help us reflect on what it means to be a newborn Christian and what we may need to think about in how to help them reach the point of being weaned.

Let me start there. What does it mean to be weaned? Weaning is the process by which a baby is slowly taken off their mother's breast milk and switched to other sources of food. The weaning process takes time, days, weeks and even months, until the baby/child no longer needs breast milk. This process happens when the baby is anywhere from 2-4 years of age.

A key aspect is the introduction of other foods and involving other people in the feeding process. Up until that time a baby needs milk, and the best source is the mother. The person closest to the child.

We will come back to this again a little farther on.

First, we need to look at the transition that occurred that created the baby's need for breast milk. They changed worlds literally. They were living in a comfortable and well-organized world. Everything they needed or wanted was available. Then something changed and the baby's world changed completely. Now they had to learn to breath. Well, it is an automatic response but a major change. They had to learn to eat. Before that moment they were being fed intravenously via the umbilical cord. Now everything has to come through their mouth, and they have to learn to indicate when it is needed. Again, a somewhat automatic process but a change.

Then there is the sudden onset of sight. Before they lived in a completely dark environment. Now they have to learn to see and learn to identify what they see. Alongside of that is the whole world of physical stimulation. A change from floating comfortably in a climate-controlled environment to this world with its constant change in temperature, humidity, and all the rest. From not needing clothes to needing them. From not worrying about bodily functions to having them happen and someone needing to clean up after them.

Step by step they will learn more and more about all of these things. Step by step they will come to a place where they will be weaned from complete dependence to different levels of dependence. For example, from mother's breast to a bottle and on.

From being carried everywhere to being able to crawl then walk. From barely able to communicate to using gestures and fascinating sounds that only parents seem to understand to simple words and phrases that most people can understand. I repeat most but not all. Parents are especially tuned to a unique communication band, with unique interpretive skills.

So from a very comfortable world to chaos. A transformation.

There is one more thing. In this early stage the baby/infant can almost do no wrong. Well, they can. Just listen to the defiant no of a small child. Watch them cry for attention. What is interesting is the level of forgiveness. Mistakes are made and repeated and the parent sees it and does not criticize. Instead, the parent provides opportunity after opportunity to learn to do things right. Mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and grow. Think about that and take time to watch a parent help a child learn to walk, make new sounds, learn to eat, and I will let you think of other areas where the goal is to use mistakes to learn and improve.

Now let us consider that new baby Christian and what they need from us as a first step in discipleship.

Let's start with the fact that they are like a newborn. The key difference is they have had an active part in the change in their environment. They are choosing to leave what was comfortable and normal for something very different and which will truthfully not be comfortable or normal.

Does this make sense? Well consider this. Even though they were living in sin and outside of God, for the sinner that is a comfortable place and seen as normal. And much like the newborn whose birth was caused by triggers, hormonal and the like, the decisions to change environments for a new Christian involves triggers as well. They can take many forms and always involve the Holy Spirit working in them and through others.

Here is a short list of triggers, you probably can think of others.

1. Tragic loss
2. Health events
3. Changes in finances
4. Encounter with a key person
5. Failure of a key person
6. Reality check – many causes
7. Memory of past events and relationships

Up until that moment life seemed normal to them and manageable. All the person needed was provided through normal means.

Now things are different. Their old friends are no longer around to support and encourage them. The normal sources of emotional support are gone and may be in opposition to the changes that are occurring in the new believer's life.

There is a need for a new support system in order for this new baby Christian to survive. There is a need for a new network of people who can respond as needed and when needed to help them deal with all that is happening and seems beyond their control.

Think about it. A baby needs feeding, changing, and lots of attention for a long time.

Now an adult doesn't need to be fed, have a diaper changed or the same kind of attention. But think about these things. They don't know where or how to get fed spiritually and emotionally. They lose control and need help cleaning up after a break down in control. Their old habits and language just don't work now. In a way they need babysitters to help monitor their world and their needs and provide the help needed at critical points.

The problem is we don't do this. We think that if they go to church on Sunday all will be well. But that is not enough. We think they can feed themselves, care for themselves, and deal with the challenges they face by themselves and with minimal input from others.

The problem is we are afraid of the demand and intensity of caring for a newborn. With our baby we do it because they are our child. But a new Christian, whose child is this person? It is so easy to pass the responsibility to others. That is not totally wrong because to be honest the best way to care for a baby is as a team, a mother and father. Ask any single parent if this is not true. As well as others who help in the process, grandparents, relatives, and friends.

In the same way newborn believers could be best cared for by a team of spiritual parents. One is never enough.

Newborn believers need feeding. They need help learning how to open the bible. They don't know what OT and NT mean. They don't know there is the Pentateuch, history, wisdom lit and prophecy of OT. They may have a slight idea of the gospels but what is Acts about and why are their letters. And for sure Revelation will be terrifying without a little guidance.

They need help learning where to begin in feeding on the word of God. They need help in understanding and accessing the incredible truth there. They need help in learning the basics and being fed properly so they can eventually care for themselves, just like babies.

And like a baby there will be the onset of all the new sights, sounds, senses, and emotions they didn't see or know about before. They don't know how to interpret it all much less comprehend all they are experiencing. They don't know what is normal, special, or inappropriate.

Sadly, we don't think this way about newborn Christians. We almost abandon them. We falsely believe they can and will figure it out. Sadly, we do this to all of those who find Christ whether children, youth, or adults. We basically expect a few to do this work and they get overwhelmed because it may not be one baby but its twins, triplets, quadruplets, quintuplets, sextuplets, septuplets, octuplets, and on it goes.

Talk to parents of twins about how that is working. Yet we expect the pastor or a few key leaders to be responsible for this critical phase of development for everyone.

The truth is if we all took part then every new believer would have the privilege and benefit of multiple parents and guides. There is truth in the idea that the best way to raise a child is in community. Discipleship should be done the same way, especially at this crucial stage. But do not forget in raising a baby there are two that are central in this process. It should be the same with discipleship. Many may be a part of the process but there needs to be a key person or two who accept the responsibility of parenting this newborn.

Think about it. These newborns don't know the bible stories. They don't know the key people. They don't know the connections between the different parts and stories. They know very little. They are babes and they need milk. They need to know the critical bible passages. They need to learn about love at a very personal level.

By now should see how important it is for all of us to be involved in caring for the newborn believer. By now we should see how important it is to be on call, like the parents of a newborn baby, to help them navigate this new life and all the change it is bringing to their world. Without this help they will, they will fall back into the past, the way things were. Let me repeat that idea. Without proper care in this initial phase they can easily return to the past where they were comfortable.

Now go back and review those scriptures and think about what they are telling us about discipling a newborn Christian.

Basic 2 – Language – learn to talk – establish identity

Movement – learn to walk

As a child is weaned. Something that happens between the age of 2-5 years of age another critical change occurs. It has to do with the new child establishing their identity. They begin to learn to have some control over their world. A key feature of this age relates to obedience. This is evident by their use of the word no.

We are at the toddler stage. They are testing boundaries. They are testing the rules. They are beginning to assert themselves and take some control over their world. As a parent this can be frustrating. You say no don't do this or that and they immediately try to do what you just said they shouldn't do. Or you tell them to do something, and they say NO. We have now entered the battleground of wills. How this is handled will be critical in the maturing process of the child.

So many books have been written about how to handle this. Options as varied as let them do what they want as long as they don't hurt themselves to very restrictive and controlling with lots of rules and structure. One has almost no rules and so no consequences for unacceptable behavior. The other extreme is where they cannot breathe without dealing with a rule and its consequences.

Behavior – so let's review some key features of this stage of development.

They want to run while still learning to walk. How does one describe how this appears. Well, you will just have to imagine how awkward it looks and it just looks like walking fast with part of the body trying to fast but the feet unable to keep up. The attempt often ends in a fall or stumbling.

They want to climb everything. They don't realize the danger that falling represents. Yes, babies do try to climb stairs and that is dangerous. Now they want to climb ladders, trees, and more. Why? To reach eyelevel with others? I am not sure but, in a way, they are like cats, they climb but then can't get down without help. Then as soon as you turn away, they are up again and stuck.

They want to try everything even when it is beyond their ability. They don't like to hear the words like you are too small, too short, too young, or not strong or big enough. They especially don't want to hear the suggestion that they will have to wait before they can attempt whatever it is they are wanting to do. They don't understand their own limits yet.

In all of this the key word is 'now.' They want to do what we and everyone else is doing now.

Then there is the fact that they do not like to be told 'no'. if you say no or don't or not to do something. They often wait until they think you are not looking and then off they go doing exactly what you said no to. Or the reverse, you tell them what they should do and they say 'no.' What is even harder to understand and very frustrating is if they do listen in this moment they quickly forget what they have been taught. They even forget that something hurt or didn't work or that they couldn't do what they thought they could and will go, do, say it all over again.

The tendency is to disobey. But do they know what that is? Yes and no, but what is happening is they are learning what obedience and disobedience are and the truth is this knowledge is gained by going through the process of obeying and disobeying and seeing what happens in each situation.

This means they require a great deal of supervision and the willingness of their parents to repeat over and over what is expected of them and what they can and cannot do. For that to work there is the need for constant supervision. Turn away for a moment and they will find a way to do something that is outside of what the parents want or expect. Sometimes it is humorous and there are many videos and pictures that prove this. Unfortunately, there are also the times when the results are not good, even risky.

What is happening is they are testing the boundaries and limits. They are testing to see what the rules are and if they can be tested and if there might be loopholes in the rules.

Act like no one is watching, as if that means they are allowed to do whatever they want. You may think they are behaving but if you turn away for a second then watch out, something can and will happen. They are in constant motion.

Up to now it sounds like I am being hard on the child in this stage. But each of these also represents an incredible opportunity to help them grow. The reason is that most of their actions are not an attempt to learn how to be bad and difficult. They act this way because they are learning who they are and how they fit.

Children at this age are like sponges, absorbing everything and processing it. Unfortunately, the process can be frustrating for those who have to supervise them But stop and think about what is happening. They are learning, they are seeking information, they are exploring their world and the people in it. They listen, hear, see, and then copy everything. It is almost scary and we should be a bit alert to this, because we are the ones they are seeing, hearing, and copying.

They want to know how the world functions and how they fit. They ask why over and over and over and ... well you get the point. they want to know how, what, where, when and a hundred other details. To get this information they turn to their parents and others who are part of their world. They are relentless in the pursuit of more, unless they are asleep.

And all of this is true of the new believer. They too will go through a similar process of exploration and learning who they are in this new world of the family of God. they too will have hundreds of questions. They too will test everything they are told, and question what we tell them. They too need to be looked after because they are unaware of the why behind the 'no' or the direction to 'do this or that.' And much like a child the information will need to be repeated until one day it finally clicks and the behavior changes.

They need parents and key people to be constantly watching, constantly available to protect them from their intent to do what they are not ready to do. They need parents who understand and are patient with them willing to repeat over and over the directions and answer the 100 plus why questions. Even more important, like any good parent, to know when to say I don't know. They know their limits and what is interesting is that these new believers like children are not offended or disappointed when the key adults in their life say they don't know. For now, that is enough. In another phase in this process more will be required but that comes later.

What I would like to do know is look at some scriptures that highlight the characteristics of people in this stage of development. There are others but these should be enough to help us understand what the issues of discipleship are at this stage in the process. They will be presented in no particular order of importance.

- Deut 6:6-9
These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 **Impress** them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. NIV
- Deut 11:18-21
Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 19 Teach them to your children, **talking about them** when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 20 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the Lord swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

As has been mentioned a key aspect of this time is repetition. You must never tire of repeating what must be learned. These scriptures focus on this reality. The word impress is that kind of word. That is done in two ways One way by the level of intensity of our emotion and manner when providing critical information. The other is by sheer repetition. Over and over in multiple contexts and situations we give the information with the hope that one day it will become clear to them and they will accept what is being taught.

- Ps 34:11-14
come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 12 **Whoever of you loves life** and desires to see many good days, 13 keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. 14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it NIV

This is the focus of what is being done. the hope that they will see and learn before they are hurt or someone else is hurt. The goal is for them to learn to choose what is right over what is wrong on their own. Which means they need to be taught the danger that exists and so learn to choose correctly

- Isa 28:9-10
Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast? 10 For it is: **Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there**
- Isa 28:13

- 13 So then, the word of the Lord to them will become: **Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there** — so that they will go and fall backward, be injured and snared and captured.

Jeremiah was pretty clear on this one. He thought of the people as children that needed rules and guidelines. It is what life is, do this do that, don't do this don't do that. Here are the rules for this and for that. Rules to govern everything and if there isn't a rule a wise parent knows how to think on the run and make a good rule to cover whatever unique event is occurring. Hopefully it makes sense. Don't think that just because they are children you can make up any rule and they will respond correctly. Well at least what you are defining as correctly.

- Eph 4:14-16
Then we will no longer be infants, **tossed back and forth by the waves**, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming
- Heb 5:11-13
We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the **elementary truths of God's** word all over again. You need milk, not solid food!

This is key to this period of development. Infants will listen to anyone. They are very trusting. They can be easily influenced. A lot of care needs to be given to what we say and do so that it is consistent. Along that line we need to be careful in defining who has the right to give direction to children. This has become a critical issue these days. There was a time when you could trust most any adult to give wise direction to a child. That is not as true today. Our goal should be developing an awareness of who to trust and what instructions are safe to follow. We need to give them a good foundation that they can use in the future.

Isa 6:9

He said, "Go and tell this people: "**Be ever hearing, but never understanding**; be ever seeing, but never perceiving."

This is what we want to avoid happening. The challenge is in the reality that for a while it will appear to us that they may hear what we say but will not understand. They will see what we do but not understand. The goal of this period in discipleship is to help them move beyond this to a place where there is a basic understanding and perception of why and what and how and so on. For some it will take a great deal of time and patience. For others it will move along at a faster pace. Each child/new believer is different.

Dt 1:43-44

So I told you, **but you would not listen**. You rebelled against the Lord's command and in your arrogance you marched up into the hill country.

Jdg 2:16-18

Then the Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. 17 Yet they **would not listen** to their judges but prostituted themselves to other gods and worshiped them.

Unlike their fathers, they quickly turned from the way in which their fathers had walked, the way of obedience to the Lord's commands.

Jer 25:7 "**But you did not listen to me,**" declares the Lord, "and you have provoked me with what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves."

This is so true of children at this point in their development. They seem to not be listening. It is a phrase that is used over and over in scripture of those who chose to disobey God. they didn't listen. Of course for adults this is a conscious choice. Adults choose not to listen. But think about it, children are choosing not to listen and then what happens? Well, we adults can lose control and overreact.

At this point we need to be careful and carefully consider of the action of not listening is them just being a child who is growing in knowledge and understanding or is a child that is becoming defiant. This is a critical issue. Which leads to the next set of scriptures.

Jer 17:23-24

Yet they did not listen or pay attention; they were stiff-necked and would not listen or respond to discipline.

Jer 19:15

"This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'Listen! I am going to bring on this city and the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, **because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words.**'"

Jer 32:33-34

They turned their backs to me and not their faces; though I taught them again and again, they would not listen or respond to discipline.

Ne 9:29-30

"You warned them to return to your law, but they became arrogant and disobeyed your commands. They sinned against your ordinances, by which a man will live if he obeys them. Stubbornly they turned their backs on you, became stiff-necked and refused to listen.

NIV

Jer 11:8

But they **did not listen or pay attention; instead, they followed the stubbornness** of their evil hearts. So I brought on them all the curses of the covenant I had commanded them to follow but that they did not keep."

Here we enter into what one will see in a child. They will turn away from the parent then look over their shoulder to see if the parent is paying attention. If they think they aren't then they go ahead and do what they were told not to do. Or they watch for a chance to stop being obedient and then do what they want to do.

They appear to fit the description here of being stiff necked and stubborn. They appear to be turning their back on their parents and become self-willed. At first they are not. The concern is that if we don't pay attention we can end up with a child that throws temper tantrums and becomes difficult if they don't get their way.

Think about the adult believers who are selfish and basically have a temper tantrum when they don't get what they want. Could they have overcome this if they had had a parent, key leader, who helped them through this process? Could they have come through this phase with a better understanding of what the do's and don'ts mean and learned the right set of rules for being a true disciple?

Jer 25:5-7

They said, "Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the Lord gave to you and your fathers for ever and ever. 6 Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not provoke me to anger with what your hands have made. Then I will not harm you."

This is the goal of every parent, to get the child to turn away from being defiant and learning to grow in a healthy way. A way that allows them to respect others and be respected.

Php 3:1

Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! **It is no trouble for me to write the same things** to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

NIV

I love this passage. It is exactly what is needed in this stage of development. Paul was not afraid to repeat over and over as often as necessary critical information. He knew that if he did this correctly, they would be protected from future mistakes as they grew.

So how does all this relate to a new believer?

They do need constant supervision. They will choose not to listen.

Consider the alcoholic who is told they can't drink and believes that one small drink won't hurt. Consider anyone who once making a change to leave what was harmful suddenly believes that one more time or just a little won't be a problem. And if no one is watching....

At the same time keep in mind that at this time they are learning and growing rapidly. They are not afraid to try new things unless prevented or something else hinders them. They want to learn and are constantly asking why, how, and other questions. Often to the point of frustration. They are also watching and absorbing what they see and hear in our lives. Contact and more contact and more contact is so critical in this stage of life. They copy what they see and hear and sense in the lives of the people around them, especially their spiritual parents.

Hence the instruction to teach children sitting, working, eating, every moment possible. We need to be actively involved in the lives of new believers. Involved in such a way that they see and hear us as we sit, work, play and live so that they will have the freedom to test everything they are taught in an environment designed for them grow and learn because they know they are loved.

Is that not why we go through all of this with our children? So they will learn because they see our love as we repeat and repeat and answer the 100 questions of why.

Self 1 Feeding – learn to read

Clarity – Correction and repetition without criticism

Lets start by thinking about what children of this age are doing. It is an incredible time of growth and development. So much is happening, it is almost overwhelming. But we can use a few things to highlight this time in their lives.

It is a time of learning to read and write. It is also a time to learn basic math. You know adding and subtraction. As I remember it, and this may have changed, we were given page after page after page for practice. Pages with lines to learn to print the letters of the alphabet. Over and over, we copied those letters until they looked like the original example. I even got graded for penmanship. Did you?

And then there were the reading books. Each period has the books that everyone reads. I have a copy of a McGuffey reader from years ago. In my day it was the Dick, Jane and Spot book. Books that helped us learn to pronounce the letters. When my children were learning this, there was a new phonetic system being used to accomplish the same result. I imagine things have changed, but the goal is still the same basic skills in reading and writing.

Then there were the pages and pages of addition and subtraction pages. It was mind numbing repetition until it was automatic. As soon as you saw a set of numbers, like $2 + 3$, you knew without thinking the answer was 5. No set theory, just plain old memorization. It was not about understanding the why, it was about knowing the answer.

Another feature of this age group is the constant need to change. Change the activity, change the setting, change things so that there is no time to become bored. At this age, sitting still for long periods of time is not easy. Remember the famous line while traveling, are we there yet?

When they come home, they want to show you all they have done. I remember the papers and pictures and how they got stuck up on the refrigerator or display board or some place to be seen, at least until the next set of papers came home. They even got stored in a drawer or box or some place so that the child knew their work was considered important. I found a collection of these papers 20 years later in a container. A reminder of all that was happening and how important my achievements were to my parents and for them to recognize what I had done.

Even in the church in the children's programs there is this emphasis on basics. The core stories of the Bible, the key characters, the life of Christ. There is also a lot of memorization. Sunday school always had a memory verse and if you grew up a few years ago there was always a time to recite that verse for everyone else. The Wednesday night programs had memory verses. One in particular comes to mind and that is Awana which has a strong focus on memorizing scripture. When I went to camp there was a competition to see who could memorize the most scriptures.

Even for adults there are scripture memorization programs. You can buy packets to carry and just flip through them over and over and over. Much like those pages for practicing math and writing.

So discipleship at this point should have this kind of focus, learning key scriptures, repetition, and more repetition. Learning vocabulary, learning stories, learning about the people, and learning about the life of Christ and so on.

This takes time. This takes a willingness to repeat. This takes a willingness to listen. This takes a willingness to provide lists and resources to satisfy the hunger for more that we should see in their life as they grow and develop.

It is about developing healthy habits which only happens through repetition and good support and lots of encouragement. Which means you may have to take on the goal of memorizing scriptures as well as an encouragement. You may need to ask them to read scripture and listen to them to help them.

It is also a time when children learn vocabulary. Did I forget to mention this above? Well, it is. Lists and lists of words to learn to spell and to learn their definition, at least the basic core meaning. With the young Christian this will be true as well. We have a lot of unique terminology in the Bible and as part of our life as a follower of Jesus. The very word we are discussing is one, and it needs to be carefully and clearly defined.

This is not about dealing with theology, that will come later. This is about providing the vocabulary that will be important when that time comes. And I am not talking about those monster words like soteriology, Christology, or imminence. They need to be learned, eventually. Now it is about learning the keywords that form lists like the fruit of the spirit. Words that define who we are like forgiveness, confession, repentance, and the like. Without these words like reconciliation and restoration are hard to explain.

We are feeding children at this point not mature adults and we need to keep that in mind. When a child answers a tough question or asks about a big word what do we usually do? We find ways to use smaller words and simpler concepts to begin the process and lay the foundation for what we know will need to be dealt with later.

There are quite a number of scriptures that can help us understand better how to be effective in helping the new believer grow. There may be more. I have decided to list what I have found and make brief comments with each.

- · Deut 6:6-9

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

The key word in this is impress. This word implies repetition and a clear focus on making sure the information is received and can be repeated without mistake. You hear the teacher handing out the practice papers and the repetition. Talk about them all the time. Tie them as symbols, do the worksheets, memorize this. Put the information on the whiteboard, on the bulletin board, on the refrigerator so we don't forget.

- · Deut 29:29

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Until we start learning things it is all a secret and a mystery. Until we learn basic addition, writing, reading and so on everything will remain a mystery. Just ask an adult that has just learned to read and you will

see what I mean. God has revealed them and now we must begin the process of giving this new believer access.

- · Ps 34:11-14

come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 12 Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, 13 keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. 14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

It is at this stage that we can truly begin to teach truth. it is best learned now and allows for the formation of good habits.

- · Deut 6:2-3

so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.

If we handle this process correctly, they will learn the value of respect. They will respect those who teach them. They will learn how to truly respect/fear God. Again, a time to develop good habits.

- Deut 12:25

Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord your God. NIV

This is the focus of learning the rules, the way things work. Learning what is right and wrong. Moses repeated this statement many times.

- · Deut 32:45-47

When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, 46 he said to them, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. 47 They are not just idle words for you — they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

One of the struggles of training, discipling, is the need to convince those we are responsible for that what they are learning is important. Repeating over and over those math tables, reading over and over those phrases, copying over and over the letters seem pointless until later when you realize how important they are to what is next.

- · Matt 21:15-16

But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. 16 "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?"

Sometimes we forget the fact that in the midst of all the repetition they are learning and growing. They are seeing and connecting the dots. When it happens, we need to celebrate what they have learned and build on it.

- · Mark 10:15-16 (Mt 18:3-4)

I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

Do we truly understand what this means? Are we willing to remember how we learned what we know? Do we let those we are discipling be children and grow at the right pace and in the right way? More important are we willing to do the same and learn from them as we disciple?

- · Isa 59:21
- As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the Lord.

Here again is the need for memorizing the word. What we memorize and so learn will never be lost. Do we see the importance of this process for those we are discipling?

- · Joel 1:2-3

Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? 3 Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.

We are tasked to tell the child, to teach them the stories, and repeat them so they will be able to do the same for their children. How many times have you read the same story to a child? why do you do that? There are two reasons, they like hearing you read and enjoy the story. Use this time of readiness and fill it with the truth from God's word.

- · Matt 11:25-26 (Lk 10:21)

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure

If you have spent any time teaching children, or teaching anyone young in their faith you will learn this truth that sometimes they see things we miss. But if we aren't teaching them and listening then these hidden blessings will never occur.

- · 2 Cor 6:11-13

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. 12 We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. 13 As a fair exchange — I speak as to my children — open wide your hearts also.

Paul knows that when we were children our hearts and minds were open to learn. He is hoping they will remember this fact and be open as children to what he is sharing. This is true of all young believers they are open to learn. Our task is to feed their desire and help them be open to what God is providing for them.

- · Eph 6:4

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

As always if we are not careful we can overdue things. A wise teacher knows when it is time to stop repeating and do something else. Knows when it is the right time to resume a paused activity. Knows how much can be accomplished in the time available and sets the expectations correctly according to the person involved. You can overdo even good things. We need to know the best way to train and instruct.

- · Col 3:20-21

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

This is a much needed reminder for the children. How we share it will bring blessing or discouragement. It could also create a negative response to further teaching. We need to help them grow and know how to avoid excess.

- · 1 Peter 1:14-16

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

While this comment seems to be for children it is also to us who are doing the teaching. Children are ignorant. They are vessels to be filled with knowledge and truth. The goal in this process is not to make them our disciples or duplicates of what we think is correct. We are to reveal God to them so they can live as God wants them to.

- · 1 John 2:12-13

I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

In the midst of all the repetition one theme needs to remain clear. They have been forgiven and all they are learning is a result of this incredible gift and blessing.

Children at this age, young believers at this stage have incredible levels of energy and seem to be in constant motion. They are also hungry to learn. One more thing is they need approval, to have others tell them they are doing well and know they have our approval and support.

Let's do a quick review of the key aspects of this time in the discipleship process.

Learn how to study God's word. Daily devotions, Journaling, etc

This is what we should be building towards. We should be giving them the foundational tools they will need to study God's word and tools that will help them understand and apply it to their lives.

Clarity – Correction and repetition without criticism

The point of repetition is not really how often they get it wrong but doing something until they get it right. Our correction is not to demean but to reinforce what is correct. If that happens then they will know the information and be able to use it in the next steps.

Reviewing of habits and desires to help them see what God wants

A critical goal is the establishment of habits that will help them grow. This needs to be done so that it creates a desire to continue learning and growing. If done correctly they will begin to see what God is doing and start to understand what God wants to happen in their life. What we need to keep in mind is that this often takes time. Do you remember how many times you copied a given letter before you and the teacher were satisfied with the results? Do you remember how many worksheets you completed on the way to learning your math tables? Probably not. Why? Because in the end the focus was not on how long but that you succeeded. This needs to be our attitude as we work with a new believer. Not on how long but making sure they succeed in developing the skills and habits that will be so critical as they mature.

Self 2 – Language – investigation

Encouraging them to ask questions, even hard ones, and to explore their new faith

Movement – learning boundaries

Learning about the false paths and false truth and how to identify them

This age corresponds to the last years of elementary and possibly first part of middle school. It is hard to really define this simply based on age or current grade because people develop at different rates. Whatever guide you want to use to define this group, by age or by grade, think of it this way. It is the last years before the onset of puberty.

In some ways you may think, how is the group any different than self 1? At first glance so much appears the same. There is still a lot of repetition in the learning process. There is still the need to learn basic elements of so many things. Their behavior and their interests are not significantly different, at least at first glance.

But take a moment and look a little deeper into what is happening. Physically they are growing and in that process, they are becoming less awkward in many ways. They still have lots of questions, but the nature of those questions is changing and sometimes they make us feel awkward and uncomfortable because they touch on complicated subjects. Things like sex, race, and on this list can go. They have an uncanny way of asking about the topics that make us the most uncomfortable. How we respond is critical to their ongoing development. You don't have to give an encyclopedic answer, but you do need to be honest and clear in the answers you give.

As for the repetition. Yes, they are still doing all kinds of math and writing practice, but it has changed. The math is now multiplication and division tables. It is adding and subtracting compound numbers. The reading has definitely progressed from See Dick See Jane See Spot Run to reading short stories. We see similar development in our children's programs. Now we tell more of the story and memorize longer passages. The writing has advanced, or used too, from printing to learning to write in script form. I could go on. Art changes, music now looks at simple harmony, gym skills are advanced to match greater ability in this area.

What is happening is the process of building on what was previously learned and learning how to expand that.

One other thing happens with language. It is at this time they begin to learn basic grammar. You remember nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and simple sentence structure. The central idea is building on what has been learned and expand the capacity to use that in new ways.

Now let's look at our new believer. In many ways the process is the same. Unlike elementary school there is no clear curriculum. We are not talking about children who know little and need to follow a set program or plan so that they learn what is critical to their continued ability to deal with more complex information.

Our new believers will have a variety of backgrounds and experiences. They will need us to help build the critical foundations but, unlike the elementary student, we cannot have a one size fits all plan. That may have worked at the level of self 1 but now we are going to see shifts. They still need to learn how to investigate or study the bible, but we need to be aware of key areas that need to be focused on. There is

more life history involved than there would be in the life of a 10 or 11- or 12-year-old. Or if you prefer a 4th 5th or 6th grader. They are still learning how to build on what they have learned. They are still learning how to read and understand what they are reading. The difference is in the history and experience they bring with them.

Obviously, they are going to start asking harder questions. Some of which will be hard for us to deal with and even answer. Some of them will reveal the conflicts that arise in their thoughts and what they are learning. How we handle these questions will be important as they entered the next stages of growth.

In all of this the boundaries are becoming more defined. Even as we begin to see the development of personal interests and directions in children. Interests based on physical development, emotional development, personal encounters with key people, and individual experience. The same is true of our young believer. The sources for these focuses will be different because of who they are, where they have been, what has happened and so on. All that means is that our focus needs to match who they are and where they are. Actually, any good teacher of the children in self 2 does this and encourages them to explore those interests.

Repetition is still critical. The difference is in focus. Do we see who they are and what is needed? Our ability to identify the beginnings of this shift will be critical in the next levels of discipleship. We should be seeing the need to recognize key areas of ability, interest, need and attention. The plus to all of this is we are not a teacher with a class of 20-30 students. We are dealing with a person or maybe a few and so we can be more responsive. For example, we can suggest different materials and authors for them to read. We can focus on different parts of the bible that might be more useful in their ongoing development. There may be themes that need more attention and repetition in the way of scriptures to learn.

They are also learning boundaries. They are learning about how to relate to each other. Learning about a type of grammar, if I may use this concept. The grammar of people and relationships. What actions, attitudes, behaviors fit in the group they are part of. At the same time, they are learning what is false and misleading. They are still susceptible to being misled. This is part of the boundary issue. How do I know when something is right or wrong. You repeat your grammar lessons until you can hear when something is out of order. You repeat your scriptures and learn them until when someone makes a statement, they can feel the rightness or wrongness of what is being said.

Does that make sense? It should. It is about helping their conscious to start working the way God intended it. I do need to make one correction. There is a time when you can play with grammar and that is in the writing of poetry. Even as I state that, be aware that the ability to do so is based on a deep and clear understanding of grammar and how to use it to create tension and thought through altering the grammar. This is done to build awareness and take a person deeper into reflecting on a particular idea or concept.

If we are wise, we will open the way for them to progress a little smoother into what for many is time of turbulence and heightened emotion. The years of youth.

So, what about scripture? Does it have anything to say to this? Actually, we should review the same set of scriptures from the previous section but from this new perspective on growth and awareness.

Let's review them again but from the new perspective.

- · Deut 6:6-9

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

The key concept is still the idea of impressing on the person the truth. You still do this by repetition but with a focus on where they are and how they are developing. That is the big difference. The practice and repetition have to match the growth and development that is occurring. It also needs to start stretching them a little. Actually, they may be the ones that start stretching us with the questions, and changes they are experiencing.

We will probably need to adapt how we remind them. Kids at this age may bring less things home for us to see so we need to do more to explore what is happening and how they are doing. In the same way our new believer will need us to pay more attention to how they are doing. It is not just saying they are doing well but why they are doing well.

- · Deut 29:29

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

They are learning more and more about how things are connected. A good teacher helps this process along. We need to help them see that the lessons they are learning are connected. The bible contains threads of truth that run throughout and now is when we need to start connecting the dots. This about learning how to help them build on what they have learned to create a bigger picture. Simple addition leads to more complicated math which allows you to continue building. What is critical is to be sure what we are teaching builds on what they have learned and fits the world they live in. I wonder how many children lose interest in education because the teacher fails to show why what they are leaning is important. In the same way, we need to be sure that how we help the believer at this stage continues that building process as well as helping them to see its value in their life.

- · Ps 34:11-14

come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 12 Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, 13 keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. 14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

In the first years of life, we simply tell our children what to do and not to do, what to say and what not to say. If they make mistakes, then we correct them. Now we need to build on that. Simply saying it is right or wrong is not enough. Now we need to begin explaining why they need to listen to us. In the same way with a young believer, it is not enough to say this is right or wrong, explanations are needed. Explanations that build on what they already know.

It is time to move from simple prayers to prayers that connect them to the person they are speaking to. We started teaching them things like “now I lay me down to sleep I pray the Lord my soul to keep, but if I should I die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take, bless mommy and daddy and so on...” It is time to help them build on the truths found in that simple prayer and learn to grow in how they communicate with God.

- · Deut 6:2-3

so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.

One of the most difficult lessons to teach is the difference between fear as in being afraid of something or of the consequences of our actions and fear that is based on respect. Another word for this is awe. Respect based on fear will work for a while, but it is not enough to build a strong relationship with God. If all we do is fear God and his punishment, then we will not learn to respect God and learn the level of fear that takes us to awe and true respect of who he is.

If we handle this process correctly, they will learn the value of respect. They will respect those who teach them. They will learn how to truly respect/fear God. This is a critical time to help begin making that transition.

- Deut 12:25

Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord your God. NIV

Before the focus was on learning the rules. Now we can start to work on helping them understand the rules and why it is important to do what is right. Just saying 'because I said so' is not enough. They want to know the why behind the rule. Time needs to be given to teaching them why rules are important and what their function is. It is not just about doing what is expected but beginning to understand why it is expected.

- · Deut 32:45-47

When Moses finished reciting all these words to all Israel, 46 he said to them, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. 47 They are not just idle words for you — they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."

Here there is not much change in the focus. They still need to learn, and the best way is by repetition. The good news is that if we have done this well and we have made the process interesting. Then they will thrive. One thing that can happen and it can be both good and bad is that it can become a competition. They compete to see who can do something the best or the fastest. This is not bad. It can represent the fact that the truths being learned are becoming part of who they are. The danger is that it can be used to create negative comparisons. I am better than you because I can do this faster, better, etc.

Competition is not wrong. I won a weeklong bible memory competition during a camp. What was more important is that that experienced open my heart up to hearing God's call on my life. That is the critical issue. Does learning more and more simply create comparison or begin to open the person up to hearing why they are learning more and more.

- · Matt 21:15-16

But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they were indignant. 16 "Do you hear what these children are saying?" they asked him. "Yes," replied Jesus, "have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'?"

(Sometimes we forget the fact that in the midst of all the repetition they are learning and growing. They are seeing and connecting the dots. When it happens, we need to celebrate what they have learned and build on it.) I have left the comment from the previous section here for review. If we have been doing our discipling correctly, we will begin to hear the wisdom of God from their lips in their own words.

- · Mark 10:15-16 (Mt 18:3-4)

I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." 16 And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them.

(Do we truly understand what this means? Are we willing to remember how we learned what we know? Do we let those we are discipling be children and grow at the right pace and in the right way? More important are we willing to do the same and learn from them as we disciple?)

This process continues. The key is as before knowing the right pace and method for its continued development. At this level we see the personality of the person becoming solidified. We need to match our teaching to the child that is and help it grow into what God wants it to be without losing the child in the process. A key question for each of us is, do we still have the heart of a child in us? Our answer to that question will be critical to our ability to help a young believer grow.

- · Isa 59:21
- As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the Lord.

The key to this next level is building on what has already been memorized. At first it was simply a portion of a text. Now there is a need to place those portions in the greater context and learn what comes before and after. As before there is always a need for memorizing the word. What we memorize and so learn will never be lost. Do we see the importance of this process for those we are discipling and adapting it to fit their development?

- · Joel 1:2-3

Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? 3 Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.

Now we should be asking them to read the stories and even retell them in their own words. That will allow us to see if they are understanding what we have read to them in the past. It is amazing how much more they learn when they are the ones actively involved. A key is picking material that matches their level of ability. Also it is still a good idea to read to them, but be sure you making it interesting and allow time to talk about what you are reading. Let them ask questions and then help them answer their own questions.

New believers who are adults will need to go through this process as well. It may seem strange but they too need to read the story and then tell the story. They need to ask questions and then be encouraged to answer them as well.

- · Matt 11:25-26 (Lk 10:21)

At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure

At this point if you are paying attention, you will learn that you need to listen more and more to what they are saying. Too often parents do not do this and they lose wonderful opportunities for teaching. In discipling it is the same. We need to switch from telling to listening.

- · 2 Cor 6:11-13

We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. 12 We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. 13 As a fair exchange — I speak as to my children — open wide your hearts also.

As children grow this becomes a critical factor in their ability to hear what is being taught and learned. They become more and more sensitive to whether or not we truly do care for them. Are we willing to invest time in their lives and in their growth and development. If we have not done well in honestly caring for them then little by little, they will become less open to what we have for them. This is critical as we move forward into the next levels of development. How we do at this point will have a major impact on their ability to hear us much less listen to us in the future.

- · Eph 6:4

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

I have just attended a concert of one of my grandchildren and realized an important truth. It is at this stage in the development of a person that special training is made available. Music classes for all manner of band and orchestra instruments. Choir for those willing to learn to sing. Art classes and on the list can go. It is at this point that we most open to learning specialized skills and develop them. The key is in the process not to exasperate the child. To learn how to help them practice, not a fun thing at any age, but a critical skill to develop. To learn to do this and enjoy the process, if that is possible. For some, yes, it is, for others not so much. If we are successful in helping them learn to train themselves then these skills will become foundational to their continued growth. Think about it meditation in Gods words is much like learning to play an instrument. We have to practice it until we learn how to do so.

- · Col 3:20-21

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

As much as we want to say obey me because I am your parent, mentor, teacher or other term, it is not that easy to accomplish. How we teach them to obey is important. No longer can we say, because I am...

Now obedience must go deeper, or the obedience will only be superficial and once we are out of the picture they will do what they want. The challenge is in building our relationship so that obedience is desired by both parties because of the love that exists in the relationship.

- · 1 Peter 1:14-16

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

I will repeat what was said in the prior section because it doubly important as they grow and learn.

While this comment seems to be for children it is also to us who are doing the teaching. Children are ignorant. They are vessels to be filled with knowledge and truth. The goal in this process is not to make them our disciples or duplicates of what we think is correct. We are to reveal God to them so they can live as God wants them to.

Why is this so important? If they see only us and not our relationship with God, then they will simply become copies of who we are. Do you understand what that means? How do I say this? They will see your efforts, your goals, your life, and not see who makes it possible to be holy. Many people strive to be holy by simply acting a certain way. Others are holy because God is working in them. If you understand the difference, then you will be able to teach them to be obedient to God and not to you. This is a critical lesson to learn at this stage in their growth.

- · 1 John 2:12-13

I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.

This theme must always be presented. There must be consistency in making sure they know day by day and at all points in their new life with God that they have been forgiven and all they are learning is a result of this incredible gift and blessing.

At this age they are growing in their understanding of what the word good and evil mean. They are growing in their ability to understand when they are doing what is right and wrong. They need to continue to grow in their understanding of what sin is and most important what forgiveness is and how one responds to that forgiveness. They need to see it lived out in us.

Lets do a quick review of the key aspects of this time in the discipleship process.

They are expanding their ability to learn how to study God's word. It is possible with guidance for them to establish a plan for daily devotions. It needs to be appropriate to their abilities. One might write a short phrase, another draws a picture, another learn a song. So many options.

They need to continue to develop the tools they need to develop their relationship with God.

Encouragement is a key word at this time. Helping them see who they are and the gifts and skills they have.

They are exploring their own gifts and skills. They are discovering their uniqueness. We need to help them use what they are learning to grow in their relationship with God. At this point in time, it is far too easy to

be a source of discouragement. A negative word at the wrong moment can do a great deal of damage and prevent growth in critical areas.

They are now able to use the skills they are learning to explore in more specific and personal ways their relationship with God. Much like the fact that at this age so many doors are opening in music, art, craft, and others. In the same way they are developing more individualized and personal ways of knowing God. We need to observe how they are experiencing God and help them grow accordingly.

If we have been faithful in helping them develop good habits in the earlier stages of growth, we will begin to see the fruit of that began to develop now. Again, as before we need to help them succeed, to feel that it is possible to know God and know him in their world.

Growth 1 – Feeding – self and developing confidence

Trusting them to explore their faith and grow without your direction and input

Clarity – Self – evaluation personal

Allowing them to be different from you while helping them see how to be what God wants them to be.

Before I continue, I need to make something clear. Some of those at this point in their development do not struggle with all the issues commonly attributed to this stage of life. Some seem to handle it very well and are able to process what is happening with ease. Others struggle greatly and too often they are the ones we use to define all of the others. Does that mean they don't deal with the same issues? No. They do deal with them. What may be different is all that has happened before they get to this stage of life as well as the support structures they already have in place. Having said that lets move forward and consider the issues that are common to this group.

This is a very turbulent time in the development of a person. The changes that are occurring in them and in those around them begin to take over and the individual can have huge emotional swings. Moodiness is a good word for the state of the person. I heard one person state they are incredible because they can love you and hate you in the same breath.

Often people are afraid to work with this people at this stage in development. They can be unstable, unreliable, unwilling and on marches the list of words used to describe why we can't deal with people at this stage in life. At the same time, they can be so open to learning, generous, lovable, committed and on the list goes. So many of us, too many, finally decide that we will have to wait until those in this stage of development are ready, then we can help them. The truth is if we wait until then it will be too late. We will have missed the opportunity to be part of the process that helps them become ready to move forward.

They are in an awkward time of life. So, if we are struggling trying to get a handle on who they are and what is happening just imagine the struggle they are dealing with. They need us more than either of us realizes so that they can have an example to use as a pattern for sorting out all that is happening to them. It is also a time for us to learn how to be what they need.

This awkwardness is reflected in their physical growth. There are incredible growth spurts and changes occurring in their lives. This results in another period of learning how to control movement as well as learning to control the new emotions that are developing relating to their development. There is an increase in sensitivity to how they are doing at managing all of what is happening.

Small failures send them into bouts of doubt and loss of confidence. Unfortunately, similar small victories are not as effective in developing confidence and overcoming the doubts they deal with about who they are and what they can do. When this happens be very wary of ignoring them when they are moody. At the same time be very careful how you deal with that moodiness. It is dangerous to simply ignore them and wait for whatever is happening to pass. It is equally dangerous to simply barge in and force them to snap out of it. Either way you go you are walking on eggshells, and it is easy to fail them when they need us to be wise beyond what we know.

What is of interest and important to realize is that all of what they have been doing in the earlier stages continues to be important. Repetition, memorization, building on earlier lessons learned and information gained needs to continue. If those processes and lessons are not continued, they will not be able to

advance and deal with the new information and levels of understanding that must continue to be developed and expanded. They need the stability and familiarity of that process to help them navigate all that lies before them.

Think through English, math and what is happening. Think about social relations and awareness of self that is developing. Think about the openness to the opinion and influence of others at this time. At this point they are easily influenced by the opinions of others. Peer pressure is a huge factor in how they choose what to do, how to act, who to follow, and mimic. Again, unfortunately negative influences tend to have a greater effect on how they choose. I wish I knew why this is true, but it is. They are testing all the boundaries they encounter and if one of them appears to succeed in doing what is wrong, without consequences, well why not follow their example.

They are exploring their world. This means if they don't have good foundations and patterns to begin with it will be easier for them to be influenced by others. A critical factor in this is being accepted by others. Dressing right, listening to the right music, having the right friends, being invited to the right events, and so many other things are part of this process.

What is hard to evaluate is how important our acceptance as parents, leaders, mentors, and friends is in comparison to their friends and acquaintances. We walk a very narrow tightrope in this area. If we use our status and relationship correctly then they overcome the pressure of not being exactly like everyone else. If we use it incorrectly then we push them further away and further into the very things we are trying to help the overcome and gain control of.

That and the constant impact of the major changes happening within their lives. All that is impacting their appearance, the sound of their voice, and how they respond to the world around them. It all conspires to derail even the most balanced and mature members of this development stage.

They are struggling with a key concept of scripture, and this is making sure your no means no and your yes means yes. All too often they feel trapped. They want to say yes to both groups. They want both groups to accept them. And now they begin to learn the meaning of the values their parents have been trying to teach them. The question is who will win and at what price.

Well, that is only the tip of the iceberg so to speak, about what is happening as we enter into this tumultuous time of grow in the life of a person. Yet it is also something that is easily seen in the growth of a new Christian. There will come a time when their world seems to be in a constant flux. They are caught between two worlds and struggle with moving forward in their growth.

We could use Paul's description of his struggle with sin found in Romans as an example of this struggle. Please keep in mind that Paul is describing his battle with sin but it does describe what is happening emotionally at times in the life of an adolescent or young Christian. Our emotions at times are like sin, they seem to have control and not us.

Ro 7:15-20

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do

not want to do — this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

Knowing this is important. Every one of us goes through times of struggle. It can be with sin, bad habits, out of control emotions, and so many other factors that, in a sense result in us behaving like adolescents. Are we ready for this? well who can be truly ready? More important is, will we faithfully stay by their side and help them work through all that is happening? Can they trust us to be attentive and available when needed? Can they believe we will not be judgmental? Can they see that it is possible to survive all this turbulence and grow?

So, what does scripture have for us related to this stage in a person's development? Here is what I have found. They are in no particular order.

- Prov 3:1-2
My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, 2 for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.

This is exactly what most people use as an opening line for this group or something similar. Like how many times have I told you. Or are you not listening to me. Or when will you grow up and do what you are supposed to do. There are many more twists on this. They all have one basic focus, I have already taught you the truth so don't mess up.

Of course, if we use this approach then it is pretty much guaranteed they will not hear what we say and may respond negatively. Our task is to help them remember but by their own choice. Our task is to help them see the benefit of not just hearing but applying what has been learned. How we do this will reap great benefits or seriously damage their ability to not forget what they have learned.

- Prov 4:20-22 My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. 21 Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; 22 for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body.

And here it is repeated again. Pay attention. But when the moods are swinging and the hormones swirling it is hard to pay attention. We know what will bring health and safety to their world. They don't and we need to help them learn. I have watched, painfully I might add, videos of what are called failed events. They are of people doing stupid things and the painful results of those actions. They are cringe funny. I can only watch them for a while then have to stop. Our challenge is to help them see the dangers of certain actions before they actually suffer harm. Not an easy task considering all that is happening in their world.

- Ex 13:14-15
"In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

This is the goal, that at some point the lights will go on and they will ask what we think. The key is being a part of their world so that when it happens we are there and ready to respond. Unfortunately too often we aren't and we miss so many opportunities. Not because we were not there physically but were not

there emotionally and spiritually so that we could see it coming and be prepared and present in a way they would accept and so access.

- Prov 1:8-10

Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. 9 They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck. 10 My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.

This theme is being repeated over and over. We want them to listen to us. We want them to pay attention but on our terms. We use the phrases like these. Didn't you hear what your mother said? Didn't you hear what your father said? Didn't you hear what I said? Truthfully, they heard you make sound but what did you do that would make them want to hear you?

Am I being a little harsh on the parents and leaders who are dealing with this stage in a person's development? Yes, I am. I am right in doing so. So often the problem is not with their ears it is with our presentation. We have the right goal but all too often the wrong methodology.

- Prov 4:1-4

Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. 2 I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. 3 When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, 4 he taught me and said, "Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live.

Once again, the same subject but with another twist. One that is used all too often. It goes like this. When I was your age..... Well, when you were their age the world was different. So, if you are not careful in how you use this phrase you will either push them away or make a profound connection. Push them away because your world and theirs is not the same. There were no cell phones when I was their age. They have no idea what it means to use a dial phone and have to sit in the living room to talk to anyone.

Make a profound connection not by comparing worlds but comparing challenges. By admitting what is different and then seeing if there is something that is the same that will create common ground. To do that we should never lead with, when I was your age... That is like turning on the off switch.

Better would be, I was reflecting on how things have changed since I was your age. Then focus on what has not changed. Let them lead the discussion. You may be surprised by what they have in fact heard and learned.

- Prov 23:26

My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways,

This is the goal, to connect with their heart. We can no longer depend on the fact that we are the parents, the leaders, or mentors as the basis for future relationship. We need to find deeper common grounds so that the connection goes beyond just being the one who gave birth to them but the one who loves and cares about all that is happening in their world.

- Heb 12:5-6

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

This is one of the most difficult aspects of this age, discipline. Oh, how they hate us when we discipline them. We become enemy number one. We don't care. We don't understand. We don't want them to enjoy anything. Hang in there. Be strong. If you handle the discipline correctly, one day they will love you for it. No one said helping them through this time of emotional, physical, and spiritual turmoil would be easy or without pain. It will not be easy and at times painful for both parties. The key is in how it is handled. Is it retribution or love?

Think about that a minute. How we respond to failure, disobedience, and defiance will either drive them away or draw them closer to the goal, knowing God.

- Prov 6:20-23
my son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. 21 Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. 22 When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. 23 For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life,
- Prov 3:21-24
My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; 22 they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. 23 Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; 24 when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

These two texts summarize what we are hoping to achieve as we work with, live life with, and struggle with those in this stage of development. They will one day see and find the direction and help God has promised.

- Isa 28:9-10
who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast? 10 For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there

Can you hear the adolescent in this passage? Can you hear them saying they are tired of hearing us say do this do that don't do this don't do that. All you have are rules, when will I be able to choose?

This will happen. They will resist and balk at the rules, our rules, the school rules, their friends' rules, and even struggle with their own rules. We need to keep in mind who we are teaching and how they are growing. Our goal is not compliance with rules for the sake of compliance. Our goal is to help them develop a relationship with God. something not based on just keeping the rules. A real challenge at this time. That means we need to be both patient and have perseverance. We can see the destination but all they see is the next crack or hole in the path.

- Ps 145:4-8
one generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. 5 They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. 6 They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. 7 They

will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. 8 The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. NIV

- Job 8:8
"Ask the former generations and find out what their fathers learned,
- Ps 44:1
we have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago.

Do you want to know if you are succeeding? These passages give us a clue. When the ones we are dealing with, our adolescents, started telling their friends what they are learning then we can be hopeful that the truth is taking root. Keep in mind it is not just telling them but how they are telling them what they have learned. It is about choosing, not just because we told them what to do, but because they have understood the why's and chosen. If it is because I said so then their friends can make them change their mind. If it is because they understand, then they will have the strength to remain firm in their choices.

- Joel 1:2-3
Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? 3 Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.
- Ps 44:1-2
we have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. 2 With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish.
- Ps 145:4
One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.
- Ps 44:1
we have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago.

I have again grouped a series of scriptures. While I have cautioned against simply stating things like when I was your age,' it is important to share our experiences with those we are discipling. There is value in telling them what I experienced, what happened in my life, and about my failures and successes. Most importantly how God was present in all that was happening.

It may sound like an impossible task. They just don't seem interested in anything you or I have to say. Be patient. When you least expect it the door will open and there will be a chance to share something. A word to the wise, keep it brief and be sure it is relevant to what they are asking or experiencing.

- 1 John 2:12-13
I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.

This passage covers many stages in the development of a person. I will focus on the one relevant to this age group, here identified as young men. While I am not sure exactly what age group John is referring to there is one important principle that is important to identify. It is the concept of encouragement. John tells them they have overcome the evil one.

Now for adolescents they may not be thinking of Satan as the evil one. For them all that is happening to them, the changes in boy, the hormones, the rules, the pressure. For them all of this is evil. It is their enemy and is wreaking havoc in their world.

A critical role you have is to be a source of encouragement. They need people who identify when they succeed, when they choose correctly, and when they grow. This is especially true for those just entering into adolescence. So much is going wrong that they easily lose sight of anything that is good and right in their lives. So, are you there for them? Are you enough part of their world so that you can see and encourage them?

That is a big challenge. Especially since in so many ways they communicate that they want be left alone. At least on the surface that is what they say. Deep down, they want you there. The goal is finding out how to be present without them thinking you are just interfering with their lives. There is no standard or easy answer to how to do this. It varies greatly with every person. But that is the task. More so to do it so that your words of encouragement and praise are accepted as that and not another form of control.

Well, that takes us through part one of this level. It is a crazy time in the growth and development of a person and how we handle part one will have a profound impact on how well we do at the next level.

Growth 2 – Language – listening

Movement – application

Let the craziness continue but let it shift in form and function.

Yep the teen years are always chaotic. The early years because of all the changes that are happening. The later years because of all the changes that are happening. Does that make sense? If you know anything about this stage of development, then it should. In both the early and later stages there are changes happening. At first it is about dealing with how one's body and emotions are changing everything around them. It is about navigating relationships and setting boundaries.

Then it is about dealing all those emotions and the changes that come because they are now approaching rapidly adulthood and all the responsibility that goes with that.

Let me explain a little more. Later adolescence runs from around 14 through 25. Does that make any senses. Well depending on the culture and a number of other factors that is what is happening. So here are the defining events.

1. You can legally drive a car. Of course, you have to go through the initiation process which includes convincing your parents you are in fact reliable and can be trusted with a large mobile metal object.
2. You can legally drink. At least in a public setting. This one is heavily dependent on culture, family standards, legal government regulations and so on. The idea being you are now capable of knowing the limits and abiding by them.
3. You can now choose your career. It is usually in this period that people decide what they want to do in the way of work. Will I go to college, will I go to technical school, or just start working.
4. You can choose your hobbies and interests. It is at this time that a person really considers what they will enjoy doing in the area of sports, art, crafts, and many other areas and activities.
5. You can now get married. Most cultures allow this as early as 16 and many think it should wait until mid to late twenties. That is a big span. In this case it is the idea that you are now capable of caring for another person and being able to start a family.
6. You can buy a car or a house or many other things. Now you are learning about financial responsibility and accountability.

All of the above amounts to dealing with a great deal of change and all the emotions that go along with them. Even in the Christian life there comes a time when we will begin to make decisions that will affect our involvement in ministry, bible study groups, outreach, and how our personal interests contribute or undermine our growth and development in our faith and relationship with God and the greater family of God.

So many testimonies of missionaries, ministers, church workers and others come from this time in a person's life. A time when the developmental emotional whirlwind is finally settling down so they can deal with the existential emotional whirlwind. The who am I and what is my place in this world. The what are my skills and gifts and how can I use them for the kingdom of God.

How long it takes people to arrive at these critical points depends on the person, their environment, their maturity, and the encouragement of those around them. Most schools hire counselors who are available to help those who ask for help to navigate all of this. Truthfully every person in this stage has seemingly endless supply of people ready to tell them what they should do. Not good. They don't want to be told, they want to be helped to investigate and choose for themselves. And that is a key part of the emotional change. More and more the desire, the readiness, the pressure to choose will grow or not. There are always those who just don't want to move forward or make the wrong choices and find themselves isolated and outcast.

Our task and guides is not to tell them what they should do, but help them discover it for themselves. Think of it this way. They want to drive, you want them to drive, but you can't drive the car for them. In fact, a back seat driver in the front with them is the worst thing that can happen. Of course, if something really bad is about to happen then you need to speak up. The key is knowing when. Even better is get out of the car and let them go. Trust them. If you can do that then they will come and seek you out for advice.

This applies to everything that is happening. Present but not present or evident. When you understand that then they will trust you to help them.

Books can be written about all of this. Instead of that lets look at those scriptures again from this new perspective of change.

- Prov 3:1-2
My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, 2 for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity.

If you thought that reminding them of a rule or expectation was a problem before then you are for an even greater struggle and shock. The moment you start to remind this group of anything, expectation, rule, schedule, it is like you have done them a great injury. They need the reminder, at least that is how it appears to us. But do they really. The challenge here is how to remind someone without reminding them. They know.

The best way maybe telling them thank you for remembering. Thank you for doing what you did. Not from the perspective of fulfilling your rules and expectation but from the perspective of them showing how they are displaying responsibility and accountability in their behavior and actions. Not every time they do something right but a critical point. What they are will be different for every person. Enough so they know you are paying attention.

- Prov 4:20-22 My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. 21 Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; 22 for they are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body.

And here it is repeated again. Pay attention. So do we believe they have learned? How do we show that we believe they have been listening and paying attention? Think about what rules they are allowed to change based on how they are doing. Do you allow negotiation? Do let them make decisions about what they do, when they do it, and with whom they are friends?

Truthfully the farther we move in this stage the less and less rights we have to make any of these decisions. Of course that may depend on the nature of the culture in which you live. Still our authority and rights diminish unavoidably. Which makes it harder and harder to tell them to listen to us.

Does this mean we stop paying attention, stop speaking into their lives? No, it just means we need to learn new ways of doing that, and maybe being patient enough to let them ask us our opinion.

- Ex 13:14-15

"In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

So if we have in fact developed a good foundation in those we are responsible for then this is what we hope to see happen. As mentioned above they come to us for our thoughts, ideas, and even opinion. How we respond? You know if we have the attitude of well finally, they are asking me. It is about time. The attitude of the person who we believe should be in control. Or if we have the attitude of how can I help you sort this out? How can we find the answer together?

Do you see the difference? One closes the door to them listening. The other opens the door to allow us to remind them of what they have learned.

- Prov 1:8-10

Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. 9 They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck. 10 My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.

Once again, the repetition of this theme. Once again, the reminder that how we respond will determine if in fact they will hear what we have to say. Actually, more important is if they will use what they have learned in the past and are reflecting on in the present.

Again, the question, am I being harsh in my comments? Am I overdoing it? I doubt it. The issue is not just their ability to remember, it is our ability to trust them and believe that we provide the information in a way that helps them be willing to remember.

- Prov 4:1-4

Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. 2 I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. 3 When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, 4 he taught me and said, "Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live.

I am going to repeat what I said in the previous section. It is so important for us to remember this.

Once again, the same subject but with another twist. One that is used all too often. It goes like this. When I was your age..... Well, when you were their age, the world was different. So, if you are not careful in how you use this phrase you will either push them away or make a profound connection. Push them away because your world and theirs is not the same. There were no cell phones when I was their age. They have no idea what it means to use a dial phone and have to sit in the living room to talk to anyone.

Make a profound connection not by comparing worlds but comparing challenges. By admitting what is different and then seeing if there is something that is the same that will create common ground. To do that we should never lead with, when I was your age... That is like turning on the off switch.

Better would be, I was reflecting on how things have changed since I was your age. What do you think is the same and different? Then focus on what has not changed. Let them lead the discussion. You may be surprised by what they have in fact heard and learned.

- Prov 23:26
My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways,

Let me be clear about one thing. At this point in the development of a person they actually appear to be creating distance from us. They are making decisions without us. They are choosing a career without us. If they aren't then what do you think is happening and how will that affect their ability to yield to you their heart, love you, and mind, see you as part of their world?

This is worth thinking about because it will have a profound impact on your ability to help them remember and use what they have learned.

- Heb 12:5-6
"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

They are going to make mistakes. Those mistakes will come at a cost and will create a type of discipline more powerful than anything we could envision. They will have accidents, physical, cars, emotional, failed friendships, and spiritual, sin. We need to respond correctly and help them deal with the consequences and so the discipline that comes out of them.

God and us are not always the ones doing the discipling. Life, friends, and self can also create different types of discipline. How we help them during those times will be critical to their continued growth. Also is a sign of wisdom on our part if we can help them see the difference between the discipline that is a direct result of their actions and choices and that which is clearly from God.

- Prov 6:20-23
my son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. 21 Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. 22 When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. 23 For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life,
- Prov 3:21-24
My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; 22 they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. 23 Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; 24 when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

This age is one of tumult. One minute they are like angels and in another like devils. They are up and they are down. They are in sync and then out of sync with the world. They know what is happening and then

they are lost. So much depends on them working towards a norm or baseline emotionally. A place where they feel comfortable with who they are and confident in what they can do.

This is the focus of these passages and a key goal of what we are/should be hoping to achieve. Helping them become an adult who has at least some of the critical tools needed to know be what God has created them to be.

- Isa 28:9-10
who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast? 10 For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there

One of the key things that is also happening at this time of life is the presence of multiple voices. Teachers, coaches, friends, family, and you. In the church it is the same, pastor, teacher, leader, friends and you. A critical thing to always keep in mind who you are in relationship to the one you are teaching. They are no longer children. You can give them lists of dos and don'ts. There is not a rule for every aspect of life, and you don't know enough to provide them with direction for every aspect of life. What you need to do is help them learn to discern who in all the people trying to advise them is trustworthy and a reliable source of guidance.

- Ps 145:4-8
one generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. 5 They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. 6 They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. 7 They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. 8 The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. NIV
- Job 8:8
"Ask the former generations and find out what their fathers learned,
- Ps 44:1
we have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago.

Once again, I will simply repeat what was said in the previous section. It is even more applicable now. Sometimes we are the ones who need to have things repeated so we will hear and understand our role.

Do you want to know if you are succeeding? These passages give us a clue. When the ones we are dealing with, our adolescents, started telling their friends what they are learning then we can be hopeful that the truth is taking root. Keep in mind it is not just telling them but how they are telling them what they have learned. It is about choosing, not just because we told them what to do, but because they have understood the why's and chosen. If it is because I said so, then their friends can make them change their mind. If it is because they understand, then they will have the strength to remain firm in their choices.

- Joel 1:2-3
Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? 3 Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.

- Ps 44:1-2
we have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago. 2 With your hand you drove out the nations and planted our fathers; you crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish.
- Ps 145:4
One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts.
- Ps 44:1
we have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago.

If you have done your work correctly you will begin to hear them share what they have learned with others. They may change the words and the context. They may apply to settings you would not have considered. They may adapt it in ways you did not consider. What is important is to be listening so you can hear them as they speak to others. Then affirm what they have done. approval is a critical concept and how we give it will be of great importance if we truly want them to understand and be able to communicate what has been learned to others.

- 1 John 2:12-13
I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.

This passage covers many stages in the development of a person. I will focus on the one relevant to this age group, here identified as young men. While I am not sure exactly what age group John is referring to there is one important principle that is important to identify. It is the concept of encouragement. John tells them they have overcome the evil one.

I just repeated the first paragraph as a reminder. Do we see the victories they are winning and more importantly are we celebrating them? Not with a party. Do we show our approval? I don't like that word. Do they see how we support them? Another weak word. Are they aware that we see how they are doing and are delighted, pleased, gratified, elated...? Do they know that we are with them and are part of their life and all that is happening? Do they know we are proud of them and honored by how they have chosen to live?

They know without us intruding. They know by our actions, words, reactions, and so many other subtle signs. They know and are beginning to do the same for others which will take us into the next phase or level of development.

Adult 1 – feeding – deepening life

The big focus in this stage of life is on using all that has been learned in the past and applying it to life in the present. They were the children now they are the parents. Others provided for their needs, food, clothing, shelter and transport. now they are the ones who must provide for others. They were the ones receiving support in dealing with their emotions, relationships, learning processes, and everything related

to learning how to become an adult. Now they are the adult and are responsible for another person's development in all of these areas.

This time of life is filled with dealing with the results and impacts of all that has happened in their world up until this point. Which means learning how to establish themselves as a person and becoming established in the world around them. The focus of the prior level was about identifying who a person is and where they fit, now they need to deepen their understanding of who they are and learning to become proficient in many areas. Consider how this looks in the following areas.

Before they were learning about job and career opportunities. Now the person has now graduated from a training program and has to find a job. That means learning how they fit into the world of others and what their role will be.

Before they were learning about developing relationships. Now the person may be married and is learning to live together with a life partner. That means they are learning how they fit in the life of another person. The person is learning what it means to make space for another person and learning how to help each other grow.

Before the person may have had some access to finances. You know allowances and parttime jobs. Now the person will likely have made major purchases, a car, a house (or the process of renting), or are dealing with other major debt, like their schooling. They are learning how to be responsible for their commitments and how to handle financial responsibility.

Before the person was exploring what their interests might be. Now the person is developing hobbies and activities that they enjoy. That means they have to learn how to manage their time and relationships so that one does not negatively affect the other.

Before the person was exploring what it meant to develop friendships. Now the person is developing long term relationships. That means they are learning that just being popular or successful is not enough to build on. The person will be learning about sacrifice and sharing and so much more.

The big one.

Before they were the baby, child, youth; the one being helped to grow and learn. Now it is likely that they have a baby who will become a child who will become a youth and it their turn to help that individual grow in the same way they were helped.

The demands on their time have shifted and like any adult before them there is the challenge of maintain a balance between everything above which will affect the time available for being mentored. The truth is that most young couples, young parents, young employees/ers are looking for help in navigating the labyrinth of things happening.

There are books on marriage, on child rearing, on good work ethics, on financial management and on the list goes of materials that have prepared to help them succeed in this time of their life.

In the middle of all of this is the need to grow spiritually. That means finding people who they trust who can mentor them. Someone they believe will understand them and will fit into their world.

There is a weakness in all of these. None of them are personal. They all deal with the issues in generalities. Which means while some of the advice and counsel may be useful much if it does not relate to the specific

world of the person reading it. This is even true of the materials prepared for discipleship. They are set up as programs and plans. They cover topics in a general way but rarely the specifics of the person using them.

There is another great danger that can happen. It is that many of those who should be available to mentor them will believe that since the person is now technically an adult, they should be able to do all of the above on their own. While at one level this is true, based on numbers, statistics, marriage status, work status, and other similar factors. The truth is they are learning what all that means. They may be seen as adults but still need key people to be part of their life who they can share their concerns with and consult when there are questions.

Those that have a good support system grow and mature. Those without a good support system struggle and all too often flounder.

Mentoring at this level means the same thing at all the other levels. It means being able to participate in the real time world of the person. Ideally the parents are part of this process. That is if they are willing to let their grown child guide the process. This does not always happen for a number of reasons which are not relevant to this discussion.

What is important is that there are older adults willing to participate in the life of the younger adults. Older adults who do more listening than speaking. It is amazing how often just listening allows the person to understand what is happening and so what to do.

Older adults who willingly admit they don't have all the answers and are willing to take the time to study God's and share what they learn with the younger adult. Older adults who know God's word at a personal level and help the younger adults do the same.

What is sad in my mind is how often we separate the age groups intentionally. We separate young couples, from couples with young children, from couples with teenagers, from couples with adult children and so on. We actually, without realizing prevent a critical level of discipleship from happening.

Please don't get me wrong. At times getting these groups together is a good thing. They often can and do help each other. What is wrong is there is no intentional mixing of the two groups. No access to the experience of the older group.

I will repeat one idea here. For this to work there needs to be a great deal of flexibility in time and focus. Those that can mentor have schedules. Those that need to be mentored have schedules. If we think that one person, say a pastor, can mentor a group then we are missing the point. That one person does not have enough time to fully engage in the lives of a group of people. But if we all accept that idea that we all are responsible to disciple then it will be possible to interact more fully with those being disciplined.

I hope that gives us some ideas about what is happening at this level of development.

So now let us see if there are scriptures that can help us navigate all that is before us. What is interesting is how many texts there are that can help us in this process.

- Deut 4:9-11 Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your

children and to their children after them. 10 Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, "Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children."

The instruction here is for both groups of this section. The younger generation is now responsible to teach the children. But here we also find a phrase that helps those mentoring them understand their role. They are the ones teaching the children who teach the children. There is always a need to continue learning. A wise adult knows this and wants the input of other adults so they can teach the next generation.

- Ex 13:14-15

"In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

A son or daughter never stops being a son or daughter, even when they become adults. Do we encourage them ask questions about what things mean? Do they trust us with their doubts and need for more information?

- Ps 34:11-14

come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 12 Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, 13 keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. 14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

A key aspect of discipling young adults is that our words do not promote evil and discord. Do they see this in our words and deeds? Do they reveal God, or do they contain hypocrisy?

- Ps 71:18

Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come.

The older adults have much to share. They have experienced everything the younger adults are now experiencing. The question is does the younger group see them declaring God's power and might in their lives? Do they show those under their care that God is indeed faithful?

- Ps 78:2-4, 6

I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old — 3 what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. 4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done. 6 so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children

One of the great dangers in discipling at almost any point in the process is using standard answers. Falling into the rut of simply repeating what has always been seen as the answer. The belief being that one answer covers all questions. Jesus did not treat people that way. He sought creative ways to allow people to think through their questions and issues. He used parables, questions, stories, and many other methods

to engage people in finding answers. Our willingness to present what we know in a way that allows others to process the information and find the application to their life is critical.

- Prov 1:8-10

Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. 9 They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck. 10 My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them.

When teaching people, including adults this is what we hope for. We hope they will remember what they have learned. One of our tasks is just that helping them remember what they already know. If we succeed in doing that then we are empowering them. Think about what happens when a person realizes that they have the answer because of what they already know.

- Prov 4:1-4

Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction; pay attention and gain understanding. 2 I give you sound learning, so do not forsake my teaching. 3 When I was a boy in my father's house, still tender, and an only child of my mother, 4 he taught me and said, "Lay hold of my words with all your heart; keep my commands and you will live.

Actually, a key role at this point is just that, helping the young adult remember all they have already learned and then applying it to whatever is happening in their life. They know a great deal about many areas of life. So it is not so much about teaching them new information as it is about filling in the gaps in what they know and helping them make connections.

- Prov 23:26

My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways,

In my mind this is about examples. One of the most important tools we have in guiding others is own example. Do they see the evidence in our lives of what we say?

- Deut 6:2-3

so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.

This idea of example can be seen over and over in the text. Children, youth, adults all ages are watching and will mimic what they see. So if we are legalistic in our life or hypocritical they may simply reject what they see or worse, as Jesus said of the pharisees, cause them to be even worse in their legalism or hypocrisy. If they see that we truly live by what we say, then they will have the chance to see what true joy is and be more effective in their personal growth and relationship with God.

- Heb 12:5-6

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.

There is a reality we don't like to admit. We will fail at some point, even when our intentions are good, we will fail and failure comes at a cost. Another key role is helping this group understand that failure is not the end of all things. Are we vulnerable enough to share our failures? Will we be there, not to judge, but to help them learn and grow?

Think about this. Failure contains within it its own unique form of discipline. Failure chastises. We chastise ourselves. Those we fail chastises us. Those watching us chastise us. What is important is that we who are their to disciple reveal love and forgiveness so they can repair the damage that has occurred by their failure and work on that for however long it takes. Sometimes repairing the damage of failure can take a long time. Will we stay with them and be a source of encouragement for as long as it takes?

- Deut 6:7-9

Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

- Deut 11:18-21

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 20 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, 21 so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the Lord swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth.

- Prov 6:20-23

my son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. 21 Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. 22 When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. 23 For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life,

These three passages have a similar theme. They are about impressing on others what we have learned. The images here are quite graphic. Tie a small box or symbol on your arm, forehead or on the walls of your residence. The last one is quite common. We have pictures and other objects with scriptures written on them. Talk about them all of the time, at dinner, at work, when you get up, when you go to bed, when you are walking and on and on the opportunities go to share truth.

If done correctly, then what we have to say and demonstrate will become a lamp to reveal, a light to guide, and a way to life. If done incorrectly then they will forget what they have learned and ignore what we have to share.

- Deut 12:25

Be careful to obey all these regulations I am giving you, so that it may always go well with you and your children after you, because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord your God.

This passage clearly speaks to the person doing the discipling. If we are obedient, if we do what is right then those we disciple will learn to do the same.

- Isa 28:9-10

Who is it he is trying to teach? To whom is he explaining his message? To children weaned from their milk, to those just taken from the breast? 10 For it is: Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule; a little here, a little there.

You may wonder why I have included this one again. It is simple. we need to be reminded who we are discipling. They are adults. They need to be treated accordingly, and respectfully.

- Heb 5:12-14

In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

This is about what you as the one discipling are doing to make sure you are able to provide for the one under your care. You need to be finding good sources of teaching that will help you grow as well. If you are not then you will not be able to provide what another person needs. A truly mature person, one able to guide others, knows they need to grow as well and are making sure they are studying God's word and learning to apply it to their lives before they try to guide others.

- Ps 145:4-8

one generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. 5 They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and I will meditate on your wonderful works. 6 They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and I will proclaim your great deeds. 7 They will celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness. 8 The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love.

This is what this level is truly all about. One generation helping another to know and disciple the next generation.

- Job 8:8

"Ask the former generations and find out what their fathers learned,

Just one comment. Are they actually asking you about what you have learned?

- Ps 44:1

we have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what you did in their days, in days long ago.

Same question here with a twist. Are they hearing what you are saying when they ask about what you have learned?

- Isa 59:21

As for me, this is my covenant with them," says the Lord. "My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever," says the Lord.

This is a promise and a word of encouragement to those involved in this level of discipleship. God has made a promise. If we are willing he will place his Spirit in us to help us.

- Job 12:12

Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?

One of the challenges that faces every generation is whether the younger generation will believe that the older generation has wisdom they can use? Do they have something in their life that will actually help me understand what is happening in mine and be of use to me?

There is an interesting quote attributed to Mark Twain about this. Mark Twain says that at seventeen he could scarcely endure his father, the old gentleman was so ignorant; at twenty he noticed that his father said a sensible thing occasionally; at twenty-five he was astonished at the improvement his father had made in the last eight years.

The point is that patience is critical. If we are part of their life and are patient and listen a time will come when they will be glad to hear our counsel.

- 1 John 2:12-13

I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father.

As we close this section let us go back to this passage from John. It starts with children, then moves to youth and then moves to fathers. There is a distinction made between young men, the topic of this level of discipleship, and fathers, those discipling them.

To me the passage suggests the fathers have lived longer and have a deeper relationship with God. This means they have knowledge to share with the younger generation. Do we believe this? Do we believe that each generation has a responsibility to disciple, to teach the generation that follows?

Also, the terminology for me is critical. He is not talking to pastors or elders or bishops or church leaders. He is talking to parents, members of the family of God. He is letting us see that we are all to work together to be sure each level of development grows and develops in a healthy way in their relationship with God.

Adult 2 Language – conscious of others

Movement – loving others

First, I need to make a confession. In looking at all of the previous levels there is an assumption being made. It is that the one doing the discipling is an adult. This is not always true. People in each of the growth levels can be involved in discipling others at or below them in development. Adults can easily be involved in discipling other adults.

Keep in mind that I have been dealing in a very general way with each level. I have been making broad assumptions about the normal attitudes and behaviors of those in a given level. Also, in regard to what they may need in the way of help and encouragement at that level. Norms are nice, but they should never be used to tag a person as to what they need and their true level of development and so how the discipling should be structured.

There are young people who are much more advance in their spiritual development than some adults. This is because there are adults who are new Christians and are slowly proceeding through the whole process of growth and so at different levels. Just because you are at a certain point in your natural development does not mean you are at the same point in your spiritual development.

Having said that we now come to what would be generally called a mature adult Christian. This is a person who has a clear understanding of their relationship with God and what it means to be a child of God. They are the ones seeking solid food (1 Co 3:2), looking into the deeper truths (Co 1:9), and teaching others who can then teach others (1 Ti 2:2).

We look to these people to be the ones who teach us and disciple us. The people like Peter, Paul, James, John and others in the New Testament. People like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, and the prophets of the Old Testament. We think of pastors, bible professors, religious leaders, and older Christians in the church as current sources of teaching and discipleship. And then the second list of people like Barnabas, Philip, Stephen, and the subsequent list of Timothy, Titus, Aquila and Priscila, Mark, Silas, and on and on this list goes. All people who taught and disciplined others.

That is all good and we need them all. We need the past teachers and leaders as an example. But we also need contemporary leaders to take all of that and help us apply the lessons of the past to the realities of the present. The question is who disciplines them?

Who disciplines a Peter? Who disciplines a Billy Graham? Who disciplines my pastor? Who disciplines the older leaders and adults of the body?

Let me start by asking one critical question. Is discipleship a one-way relationship? Is it only the older believer helping a younger believer? Is it only the younger believer that is gaining help and guidance in the discipleship process?

Based on my experience with discipling my answer is no. I have discovered that as I listen and help others, I too am gaining new insight and knowledge. I am being challenged to go deeper and explore in new ways my relationship with my Lord. I find that working with others opens my heart and mind to new topics and

new insights. When we interact with others, if we are being honest and not proud in the process, we will discover areas in our own lives where we need to grow.

Discipleship is not a one-way relationship. It is about giving and receiving. Why? It is because every person's experiences give them different ways of seeing the world. That means, while I, the older Christian, will see something from my perspective, the younger believer will see it from another perspective. If I am humble and astute then I will be allowing them to, in a sense to disciple me. They will help me grow through the process of helping them grow. This becomes an incredible networking resource when all of us are involved in discipling each other.

Discipleship at this level is also about one leader being a source of growth and encouragement to another. This we see in Peter's comments about the teaching of Paul (2 Pe 3:15). Also, in Paul's correction of Peter's behavior in Ga 2:11.

The focus is on the idea that no matter where we are in the discipleship process, we all need others to help us continue to grow. Even children can help adults learn. Consider Jesus' comment to the priests when the children were proclaiming Jesus as the son of David in Mt 21:14-16. 'From the lips of children God has ordained praise.' Or the fact that Jesus calls us to become like children to enter the kingdom of God (Mt 18:3).

The truth is that every level of development can help all the others grow in their faith. The issue is that this will not happen if the only ones doing discipleship are a select group of people, people we believe have the exclusive right to disciple others. If that is true, then sadly we are the poorer for it. We become dependent on the secondhand experience of others and must live our faith vicariously through the actions of others. This is never as powerful and effective as direct involvement and personal experience.

Consider these examples.

Eli and Samuel (1 Sa 2d:11, 3) – Eli was responsible for training Samuel in the service of the temple. He was critical in helping Samuel realize that the voice speaking to him was God. Yet it is Samuel the boy that is used by God to instruct Eli and many others in God's truth. He is a boy when he begins serving at the tabernacle and continues this process through his years as a child, adolescent, young adult, and on into his service as a mature adult to Saul and David.

Jesus and the teachers (Lk 2:46-48) – At the age of 12 Jesus was questioning – teaching the teachers. They were surprised at the depth of his understanding and knowledge.

Children and the priests and pharisees (Mt 21:15-16 – The children proclaimed the arrival of the son of David. The leaders did not like this. Jesus Reminded them that God uses children to proclaim truth.

Paul and Peter (Ga 2:11-14; 2 Pe 3:15)– Paul corrected Peter and later Peter told others to listen to Paul because God was using him to teach the truth.

Paul, Barnabas, and Mark (Ac 15:37-39; 2 Ti 4:11)– Paul rejected Mark after he abandoned them. Barnabas chose to work with Mark a second time. Paul later asks them to send Mark to help him because he learned he was useful.

David and Jonathan (1 Sa 18:1-4; 1 Sa 20 – Jonathan encouraged David at difficult times when Jonathan's father Saul sought to kill David.

Slave girl and Naaman (2Ki 5:1-3) – The slave girl helped Naaman see his need to go and see Elisha about his illness.

It also means that if we don't share together in this process then those that need to be discipled will be restricted to a limited access to all the resources that God has available to all the members of his family. Think about it. If everyone is helping everyone and some of us are specifically helping a few then we will all benefit and grow. That is the way a body functions, isn't it. One part benefiting the rest of the body. Everybody, every part involved, so that all benefit.

So, in this older adult group what we have are two sources for them to be discipled. The first comes from what they gain as they disciple others and the other is how they interact with other leaders. It is the idea of steel sharpening steel. Of one person helping another. Of one person encouraging and challenging another. So that all become knit together as the body or church of Christ.

Go back and read the scriptures and comments of the previous section and reflect on how this is true.

Now for some final thoughts.

We are called to encourage one another. Paul gives this instruction to the church in Thessalonica (1 Th 5:11; 2 Th 2:17). In communicating with Titus, he gives the following instructions to leaders.

- Tit 1:9 He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

The writer of the Hebrews makes this statement about encouragement.

- Heb 3:13 But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

And later

- Heb 10:25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

If that is not clear enough, then Paul makes it even clearer.

- 1 Th 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

And in Hebrews 10:24 we see the purpose of this mutual discipling

- Heb 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

The point is that discipleship occurs in community. It is not an isolated course taken to fulfill a requirement within a program of study. It is not the work of one person who honestly doesn't have the time needed to provide what everyone needs. It is the work of everyone. We are all part of the body. We are all responsible for one another. We all at one point are the babies, infants, children, youth, and adults in the church. We all have valuable insights and resources that are needed to help others.

In the call to missions Jesus did not specify that only the leaders were to go and to make disciples. Everyone who heard him that day, men, women, youth, and yes children were to go, proclaim the gospel and be involved in making disciples.

If you go back and review the scriptures used in this material, you will rarely see a comment that tells the pastor or leader to be the one discipling or training. The people listed are usually the parents, those who experienced an event and are called to share that knowledge with the next generation, and the children of those who have received the training or knowledge from their parents or the preceding generation.

If that is how the truth of the bible is to be shared and taught, then it should be how the church carries out the process of discipling. Parents, physical and spiritual, teaching their children. Adults and members helping the next generation and each other grow in their relationship with God.

The good news is that we are all in the midst of learning all the key principles of how to disciple others. We are either being taught by our parents or are the one's teaching their children. We are being disciplined and discipling others to become adults in our culture. The process is not different for becoming mature adults in the family of God.

Therefore, let us encourage each other to get involved in discipling one another.

Ideas for engagement in each level of development

Basic 1 – key here is the ability to simply spend time with the person. This time should be informal in nature. Sharing life in general so that you are creating a framework for future teaching and sharing. This could be attending concerts, sporting events, a picnic and so on.

These times are important in understanding the person, their world, and their needs. They will help you establish a relationship and create the bonding you need to create the trust that is so important to discipleship.

Basic 2 – a key thing to work on at this point is helping them learn what things mean. We use a lot of terminology that is specific to faith in God. Another focus could be on helping them navigate the bible. For example, what are the key divisions, what are the names of the books and where can they be found.

Keep in mind that it is important to use their questions and interests in deciding what to focus on. They don't need a complete dictionary of terminology. To use what they are reading and exploring to use to develop their understanding of the bible and how to understand what they are reading.

Another area could be establishing times to share what is happening and learning to pray.

Self 1 – An important focus at this point can be on the memorization of key scriptures. This would be a good time to help the person establish a time and pattern for daily devotion.

What they don't need is a list of standard scriptures to memorize. Help them select scriptures from what they are reading in the bible and that relate to what is happening in their life. Scriptures that answer or relate to the questions they are asking.

Self 2 – At this point there are two critical concepts to begin to develop. The first is becoming part of a small group study to develop other relationships and sources of encouragement and support. The second is helping them be free to ask the difficult questions and working with them on finding the answers. This means being available as needed and when needed.

Growth 1 – a critical step to help them take is being able to share their testimony with others. This can be in small group or in a church service. Another focus could be in taking the step of baptism. The point being to begin to publicly declare their decision to follow Christ.

This is also the time to help them go deeper and explore what are called the tenants of their faith. The choice of the topics should be based on who they are and what they want to know. It is also good to consider recommending key topics based on one's knowledge of the person.

Growth 2 – It is now time for them to consider how they can help others. Taking time to explore their gifts, interests, and skills. This may have already begun earlier but now can be a time of focused learning and development.

Adult 1 – Are you the only source of discipleship in their lives? If so, then it is time to help them expand their sources of input and information. Help them explore who and what could be other resources to help them continue in their growth.

Adult 2 – by now they should be involved in discipling others. Help them in the process of identifying who they can reach out to and what that means.